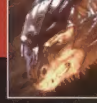
WIN ERAGON'S SWORD! SEE PAGE 14



RAMPAGE PRESENTS

REALMS OF FANTASY

www.rofmagazine.com

Magical Menagerie
Wendy & Brian FROUD

8 NEW Fantasy Tales

In Praise of the Cook: The Magic of Food

PLUS THE LATEST
Fantasy Games, Books, Art, and More

February 2007

$3.99US $5.99CAN

02

0 02281 02201 4

RETAILER: DISPLAY UNTIL FEBRUARY 5

WARHAMMER® MARK OF CHAOS™

AN EPIC BATTLE RAGES FOLLOWING A BRUTAL CHAOS INVASION, THREATENING THE REALMS OF THE EMPIRE.

Fearsome battle cries of the savage Hordes of Chaos echo through the Forest of Shadows:

"Blood for the Blood God!"

Calling upon Sigmar's divine blessing, a Warrior Priest inspires faith among the soldiers of the Empire. With their patron God's protection, they grimly turn to face the oncoming horrors.

Tournament, ladder, and clan support and up to 6-player multiplayer modes including castle sieges, reinforcement battling, traditional warfare, and objectives-based multiplayer skirmishes.

Take customization to a new level with body part swaps, weapon and armor enhancements, and more powerful controls to paint units and customize banners.

As armies battle, Heroes and Champions learn new tactics, unlock new abilities, command larger units, even challenge each other in a duel to the death.

Epic sense of both scale and detail where big demons and huge beautifully rendered battalions clash with thousands of characters battling on screens in intricate detail.

You could win the ultimate gaming PC and more!

Go to http://www.marketchaos.com/wis

USE ENTRY CODE: ROF2JT

© Copyright Games Workshop Ltd 2006. All Rights Reserved. Games Workshop, Warhammer, Warhammer Mark of Chaos, and all associated races, race insignia, marks, names, characters, illustrations and images from the Warhammer Mark of Chaos game and the Warhammer world are either ®, TM and/or © Games Workshop Ltd 2000-2006, variably registered in the UK and other countries around the world, used under license by NAMCO BANDAI Games America Inc. All Rights Reserved. The ratings icon is a registered trademark of the Entertainment Software Association. All other trademarks and trade names are the properties of their respective owners.

contents

departments

8 CONTRIBUTORS

12 MOVIES
By Resa Nelson
Controversial best-seller *Eragon* lights up the silver screen this December.

22 FOLKROOTS
By Midori Snyder
Hail to the cook, who has the power to transform through the magic of food.

30 BOOKS
By Gahan Wilson and Paul Witcover
Peter Pan flies again in the first authorized sequel to James M. Barrie's beloved story.

72 GALLERY
By Ari Berk
The House of Froud, Wendy and Brian, that is, is filled with magical beings that inspire creative collaboration. They don't do housework, though.

84 GAMES
By Eric T. Baker
The board game renaissance is evident in *War of the Ring* from Fantasy Flight.

fiction

37 THREE WISHES
By Bruce Holland Rogers
Humans can be a puzzling lot. They often say most when they say nothing.

38 LOOKING AFTER FAMILY
By Carrie Vaughn
If you go looking for monsters, it's easy to find them. They're the ones who aren't you.

44 SPARE CHANGE
By Chuck Rothman
What goes around comes around—if you're lucky and smart.

46 SYREN
By Graham Edwards
The life of a paranormal gumshoe can be tough—if the golems don't get you, the syrens will ...

56 THE DEVIL AND MRS. COMSTOCK'S SNICKERDOODLES
By Eugie Foster
Evil is where you find it—even curled up on a comfy couch enjoying a belly rub.

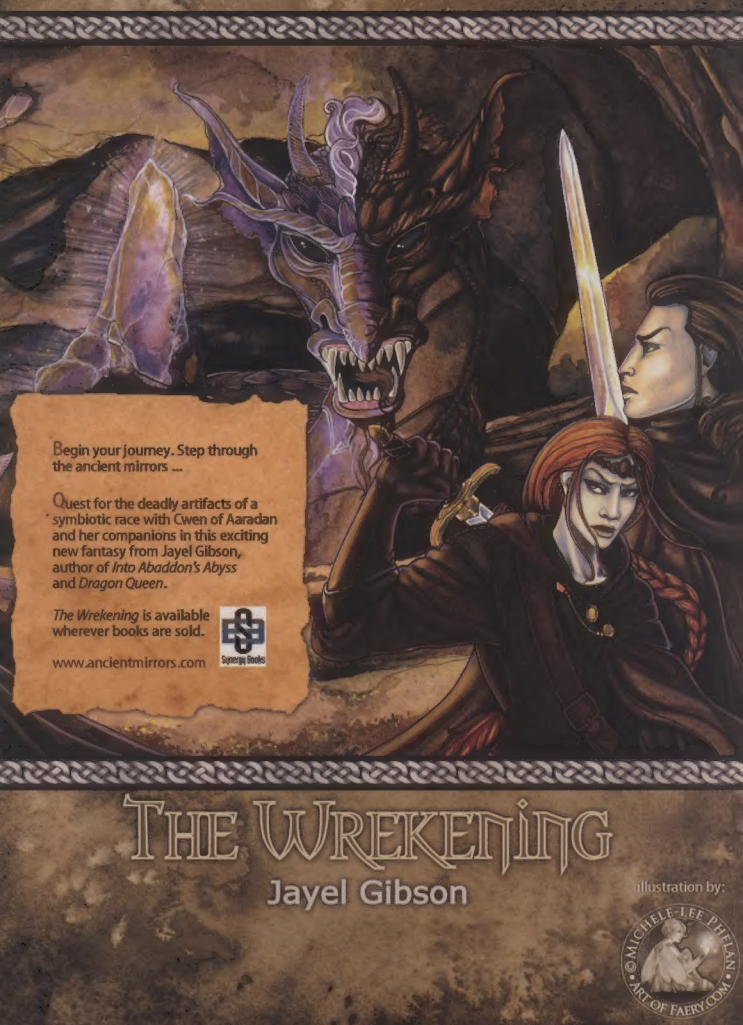
60 NUMBER OF THE BUS
By Jay Lake
Here is wisdom: Let him who hath understanding count the number of the bus, for it is the number of a wizard; and his number is four thousand five hundred and seventeen. Or maybe four thousand four hundred and twenty-two.

66 CIRCUS CIRCUS
By Eric M. Witchey
Many children dream of running away to join the circus. Others have much grander plans.

78 IN THE THICKET, WITH WOLVES
By Josh Rountree
Desperate times make for desperate gambles, and desperate people forget that the game is always stacked against them.

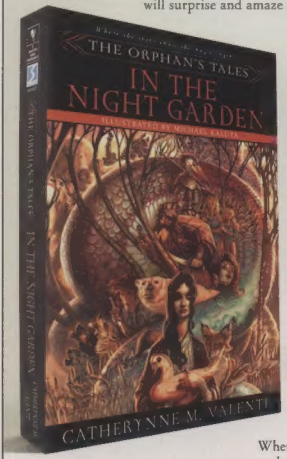
Illustration from Peter Pan in Scarlet by Scott M. Fischer

REALMS OF FANTASY (ISSN 1078-1951) is published bimonthly by Sovereign Media Co., Inc., 453 Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 20170, (703) 964-0361. Periodical Rate postage paid at Herndon, VA, and additional mailing offices. REALMS OF FANTASY, Volume 13, Number 2 © 2007 by Sovereign Media, all rights reserved. Copyrights to stories and illustrations are the property of their creators. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. *Subscription Services, back issues, and information* call 800-219-1187 or write to REALMS OF FANTASY P.O. Box 1623, Williamsport, PA 17703. Single copies: $4.00, plus $1 for postage to Sovereign Media. Yearly subscription in U.S.A.: $16.95; Canada and Overseas: $21.95 (U.S.). Send editorial mail to: REALMS OF FANTASY, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. REALMS OF FANTASY welcomes editorial submissions but assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Material to be returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We suggest that you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Sovereign Media for our author's guidelines. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to REALMS OF FANTASY, P.O. Box 1623, Williamsport, PA 17703.**


Begin your journey. Step through the ancient mirrors ...
Quest for the deadly artifacts of a symbiotic race with Cwen of Aaradan and her companions in this exciting new fantasy from Jayel Gibson, author of *Into Abaddon's Abyss* and *Dragon Queen*.
The Wrekening is available wherever books are sold.
Synergy Books
www.ancientmirrors.com
THE WREKENING
Jayel Gibson
illustration by:
©MICHELE-LEE PHELAN
ART OF FAERY.COM

IN HER WORLD, FANTASY *is* REALITY.

In a mysterious garden, a lonely young girl weaves a series of incredible tales for a curious prince—tales of shape-shifting witches and wild horsemen, beast princesses and snake gods, dog monks and living stars. Nothing is ever quite what it seems, and these beautifully illustrated stories—and their narrator—will surprise and amaze you.



"A fine patchwork of tales, quilted in diverse colors and textures. Refreshingly original . . . should delight lovers of myth and folklore."

–Juliet Marillier, author of *The Sevenwaters Trilogy*

"Fabulous tale-spinning in the tradition of *The Arabian Nights*. Lyrical, wildly imaginative and slyly humorous."

–K.J. Bishop, author of *The Etched City*

Wherever books are sold
www.catherynnemvalente.com

MUSIC FROM A DISTANT AGE . . . .
REDISCOVERED FOR THE NEW MILLENIUM

WHAT IF THE KING SHOULD COME TO THE CITY

a new CD of Renaissance Keyboard Music unlike any other wrought in the *Spirit of Both Then and Now*

Send $14.95 plus $2.50 shipping and handling (NY residents add 8.25% sales tax) to: Penguin on the Telly Ltd. JAF Station, PO Box 605, New York, NY 10116
Visit our website: www.penguin-ltd.com
Tel/fax 212-929-8610

REALMS OF FANTASY

VOLUME 13 NUMBER 2

CARL A. GNAM, JR.
Editorial Director

SHAWNA MCCARTHY
Editor

LAURA CLEVELAND
Managing Editor

SAMANTHA DeTULLEO
Art Director

DOUGLAS COHEN
Assistant Editor

Contributors:
Eric T. Baker, Ari Berk, Graham Edwards, Eugie Foster, Jay Lake, Resa Nelson, Bruce Holland Rogers, Chuck Rothman, Josh Rountree, Midori Snyder, Carrie Vaughn, Gahan Wilson, Eric M. Witchey, Paul Witcover

MARK HINTZ
Chief Executive Officer

DIANE BONIFANTI
Business Manager

TINA POUST
Comptroller

KATHY PAULHAMUS
MARY NOLAN
SANDRA HILLYARD
Subscription Customer Service

Curtis Circulation Company
Worldwide Distribution

Advertising Offices:
JEFF KIGHT
Advertising Director
(570) 322-7848, Ext. 117

453 Carlisle Drive,
Herndon, VA 20170
703-964-0361 / FAX: 703-964-0366

Subscription Customer Service and Business Office
(800) 219-1187
1000 Commerce Park Drive,
Suite 300
Williamsport, PA 17701

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Designers of Swords & Medieval Weaponry

Knights Edge LTD.

Since 1994

FREE Full Color CATALOG within the USA $5 Elsewhere

"IN STOCK" Armor & Weaponry!

Our exclusive design lines include:

Ritter Steel
Hand Forged | Functional Weaponry

Stage Steel
Battle Ready | Steel Swords

Valiant Arms
Armour & Weaponry

KNIGHTEDGE
Stag Hunting Cutlery Made in the USA

Ritter Steel
Authentics Collection

Helms, Armour, Medieval & Oriental Civil War, Weaponry, Chainmail, Crossbows, Hunting Knives, Banners, Dragons, Figurines, Jewelry, and much more!

Dealer Inquiries Welcome

Knights Edge Ltd. 5696 N Northwest Hwy. Dept RF48, Chicago, IL 60646 USA
773-775-3888 Fax 773-775-3339 Visit us at www.KnightsEdge.com

BARDIC WEB

Weave the tales of your imagination

An online community for writers interacting in a round-table atmosphere.

www.bardicweb.com

Adventure, Fantasy, History, Horror, Mystery, Romance, Science Fiction...

Roleplaying, Writing, All Original, No Fanfic. World & Mythos Building, Character Profiles, Multi ID Logins and More.

Create your own world today, join us at: www.bardicweb.com

Copyright The Bardic Web 2006

contributors

EUGIE FOSTER shares her writing space in metro Atlanta with her husband, Matthew, and her pet skunk, Hobkin—which does indeed make for some interesting writing experiences. She's a member of the SFWA, a winner of the Phobos Award, and a reviewer for *Tangent*. Her publication credits include fiction in *The Third Alternative*, *Cicada*, and the anthology *Hitting the Skids in Pixeltown*, edited by Orson Scott Card.

GRAHAM EDWARDS was born near Glastonbury Tor and now lives in Nottingham (not such a big leap from King Arthur to Robin Hood). His wife sings and his two children beg him not to leave the bedtime story on a cliffhanger; occasionally he obliges. He spent his youth on the UK's south coast. When he wasn't in the cinema he was on the seafront with an 8mm movie camera in his hand and a Force 8 gale throwing waves over his head.

CHUCK ROTHMAN lives with his wife, Susan, in Schenectady, New York, and has worked in a variety of fields. He has been active in the Albacon science fiction conventions over the years and served as a secretary/treasurer for the Science Fiction Poetry Association. He has also been active in the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, the business agent for the *SFWA Bulletin*, and was elected SFWA Treasurer for three terms. This is his first story in *Realms of Fantasy*.

JOSH ROUNTREE lives and writes in Austin, Texas. His short fiction has appeared in various magazines and anthologies including *Polyphony 6*, *From the Trenches*, *Lone Star Stories*, and previous issues of *Realms of Fantasy*. For the complete scoop, visit his website at *www.joshrountree.com*.

MIDORI SNYDER is the author of eight books for children and adults. She won the Mythopoeic Award for *The Innamorati*, a novel inspired by early Roman myth and the Italian "Commedia dell'Arte" tradition. Her other novels include *The Flight of Michael McBride*, *Soulstring*, *The Oran Trilogy: New Moon, Sadar's Keep, Beldan's Fire*, and *Hannah's Garden*. Her short stories and essays have appeared in numerous anthologies, including *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*. Snyder is co-editor (with Terri Windling) of The Endicott Studio's *Journal of Mythic Arts* (www.endicott-studio.com), and of Endicott's new mythic arts blog (http://endicottstudio.typepad.com). She lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she teaches English at a Jesuit high school.

ERIC M. WITCHEY's fiction has sold nationally and internationally in multiple genres under several names. His How-to articles have appeared in venues such as *Writer's Digest Magazine*, *Writer's Northwest Magazine*, *Northwest Ink*, and online magazines. When not writing or teaching, he restores antique, model locomotives or tosses small bits of feather and pointy wire at laughing trout.

BRUCE HOLLAND ROGERS lives in London, England, where his wife is a visiting professor at the London Business School. He teaches creative writing in the Whidbey Writers Workshop low-residency MFA in Washington State. Bruce's most recent story collection, *The Keyhole Opera*, is a finalist for the World Fantasy Award. *www.shortshortshort.com*

CARRIE VAUGHN has published about twenty short stories and a novel, *Kitty and The Midnight Hour*. Her second novel, *Kitty Goes to Washington*, was published July 2006. She lives in Boulder, Colorado, with her dog and too many hobbies. Visit her at *www.carrievaughn.com*.

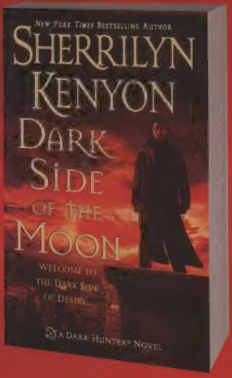
WILLIAM BROWN has been a freelance illustrator and cartoonist since 1987. His illustrations have appeared in numerous publications nationwide. His current cartoon feature, "Citizen Bill," appears in local and national publications, and was published in *Attitude*, a compilation book of cartoons edited by Ted Rall. Most recently he contributed a graphic interpretation of "A Curious Pleasure Excursion" for a Graphic Classics volume of Mark Twain stories (Eureka Publications). William's medium is scratchboard/digital. His work has won awards and been accepted into the Illustrators Club of Washington, DC, annual juried exhibitions since 1988.

VAL B. BOCHKOV, a resident of Alexandria, Virginia, specializes in illustration and design. With seven personal exhibitions in Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the United States, and Russia, including the infamous annual Edinburgh Art Festival, Val has earned great respect as an artist. Val incorporates his talents and experience to create mixed media creative concepts that include package, design, illustration, television concept, creative outdoor, and print. He prefers to use a variety of media: acrylic, oil, watercolor, gouache, and digital.

JAY LAKE lives in Portland, Oregon, with his books and two inept cats, where he works on numerous writing and editing projects, including the World Fantasy Award-nominated *Polyphony* anthology series from Wheatland Press. His current project is *Trial of Flowers* from NightShade Books, followed by *Mainspring*, summer 2007 from Tor. Jay is the winner of the 2004 John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, and a multiple nominee for the Hugo and World Fantasy Awards. Jay can be reached through his blog at *jaylake.livejournal.com*.

From *New York Times* bestselling author

SHERRILYN KENYON


NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
SHERRILYN KENYON
DARK SIDE OF THE MOON
WELCOME TO THE DARK SIDE OF DESIRE
A DARK-HUNTER® NOVEL

"These are not your mother's vampire novels...."
—*THE BOSTON GLOBE*

Half animal, half man,
wholly dangerous.
Locked in eternal battle,
a Were-Hunter knows
everything about
peril and pain.
But the greatest threat
is yet to come...

...And Coming in February,
THE DREAM-HUNTER,
New in Paperback!

www.sherrilynkenyon.com
www.Dark-Hunter.com

FREE ORIGINAL STORY
Available January 2, 2007!

Visit **www.KenyonFeartheDarkness.com** for full details and to sign up to receive this exciting opportunity.

Experience how the world of the Dark-Hunters® and Dream-Hunters intersect in ***FEAR THE DARKNESS***—an exclusive short story from SHERRILYN KENYON.

Valid through 12/31/07. You must have a computer and internet connection to take advantage of this offer. St. Martin's reserves the right to suspend or terminate this offer if fulfillment is prevented or impeded by causes beyond its reasonable control.

St. Martin's Paperbacks

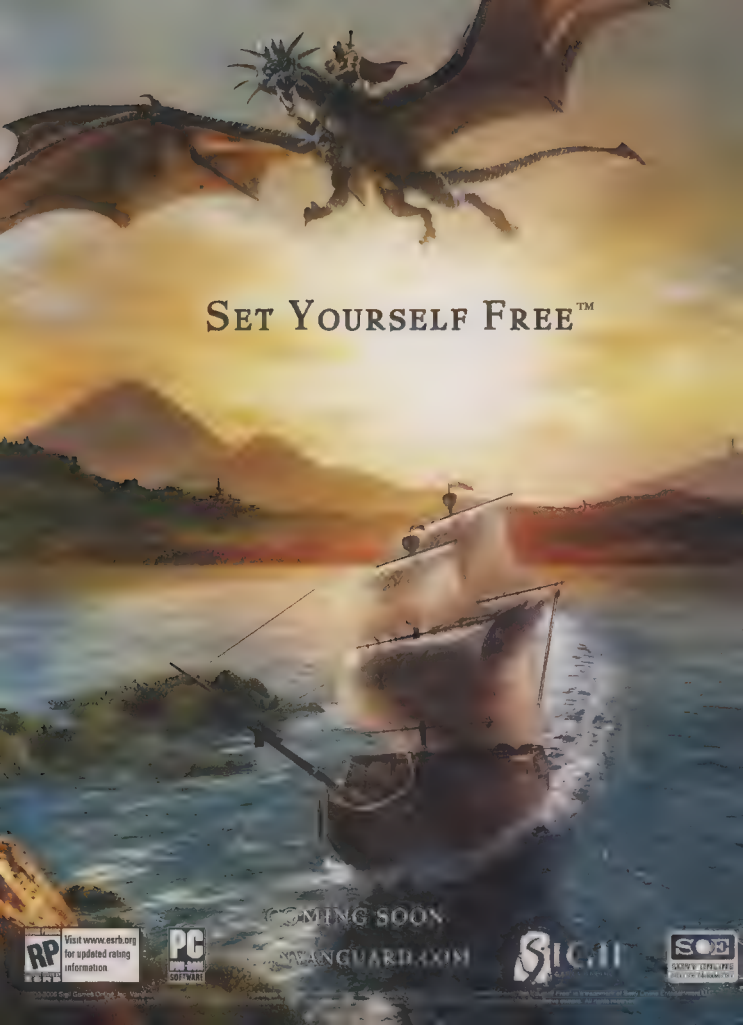
VANGUARD
SAGA OF HEROES™

Immerse yourself in the ultimate online fantasy world, where the only limits are your own. With each new quest you will discover that Vanguard: Saga of Heroes is more than a realm of freedom and adventure; it is the path to your chosen destiny.

Explore a vast, breathtaking world of living art: the final masterpiece of legendary fantasy artist Keith Parkinson.

Create chains of special attacks and powerful reactions with a groundbreaking dynamic combat system.

Command the skies on your dragon, roam the world on your warhorse, or choose from dozens of other mounts.


SET YOURSELF FREE™
COMING SOON
VANGUARD.COM
Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information
PC SOFTWARE

By Rosa Nelson

Controversial best-seller *Eragon* lights up the silver screen this December.

One of the most controversial fantasy novels in the past few years, *Eragon* is now a major motion picture scheduled for release on December 15 from Twentieth Century Fox. At the heart of the controversy is novelist Christopher Paolini, who wrote *Eragon* at the age of 15, the same year he graduated high school—he was home-schooled in Paradise Valley, Montana. After a year of revisions and another year planning how to sell it, his family self-published Paolini's novel. About a year after publication, *Eragon* was picked up by Random House, where it became a sensation and dominated several lists, including *The New York Times* Best-Seller List.

But Paolini's young age is just the beginning of controversy. Critics and fantasy authors have suggested that *Eragon* is derivative, drawing heavily from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the *Star Wars* movies, and Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern* book series. McCaffrey herself has praised *Eragon*, whose hardback dust jacket features a gracious quote from her.

On one hand, it's easy to understand the criticism. Like Luke Skywalker of *Star Wars*, *Eragon* (played by newcomer Ed Speleers) is a teenage farmboy who feels like he's stuck in the middle of nowhere. His parents have always been mysteriously missing from his life, so he's been raised by his uncle. He lives in Alagaesia, a country ruled by an evil empire. There are legends of a rebel organization of dragonriders determined to overthrow the empire. After Eragon finds a stone that turns out to be a dragon egg, the evil empire's thugs come looking for him—they kill his uncle and destroy the farm. An old villager named Brom (played by Jeremy Irons of *Reversal of Fortune*) steps forward to become Eragon's mentor. Brom promises to teach Eragon how to fight and to help him find the rebel dragonriders. In their travels, they join forces with Murtaugh, a rogue on the run who seems like a mix of Han Solo and *The Lord of the Rings*' Aragorn.

Saphira, who chose Eragon as her dragonrider as a hatchling, transforms into an amazing warrior and is the key to Eragon's success. RIGHT: King Galbatorix (John Malkovich) confronts Durza (Robert Carlyle)

Like the characters in McCaffrey's novels, Eragon bonds with the dragon, Saphira, once she hatches and they discover they can communicate telepathically. Eragon and Saphira become friends who depend upon each other. Like *The Lord of the Rings*, Paolini's story takes place in a world of fantasy races,

THE OFFICIALLY LICENSED SWORDS OF
eragon

including elves and dwarves. Like Tolkien, Paolini has even made up his own languages.

On the other hand, Paolini combines all of these elements into a story on which he stamps his own brand. Is it fair to criticize him for borrowing so much from so many?

Elizabeth Gabler, president of Fox 2000 Pictures, believes such criticism is unjustified. First of all, it's an inspiration to hopefully many aspiring writers. It's an encouragement that if you follow your dream and do what you believe in and let your creative instincts guide you then you can be a success, too. Everybody shouldn't be afraid to try.

I think a lot of kids are grateful to Christopher that he wrote something they can respond to this strongly. Frankly, I was an English major. My work is greatly based on writing and writers and screenwriters and novelists and playwrights, and anything that's getting kids to read at this level is one of the most positive things that can happen in our culture. I commend him for that.

About Paolini's work, she says, "The real story is told in three parts. The first book [on which the *Eragon* movie is based] is technically the first act of the whole story. It remains to be seen what he's actually done, because no one's read the last book."

Before Paolini wrote *Eragon*, he outlined his trilogy. His first two novels—*Eragon* and *The Eldest*—have been wildly successful. In a lucky twist of fate, Fox took a chance and committed to making the movie before the novel became a breakout hit.

"It hit the best-seller list," Gabler says. "It was on the children's chapter books best-seller list, which is where the *Harry Potter* books are. For all we knew, it was going to be there for a couple of weeks then be replaced by the next phenomenon. But instead it managed to become its own entity and stayed on the list for well over a year until the publication of the second book, *The Eldest*."

At press time, Paolini is busy writing the third and untitled book in his *Inheritance* series.

"Everybody's inspired by a lot of different things," Gabler continues in regard to accusations that Paolini's work is derivative. "The mentor character, Brom, for example—those are classic relationships that appear in just about everything. Great storytelling has similar themes of humanity. I think it's perhaps unfair to criticize him in that way for inventing his own world and being inspired by things that were shaping and forming his imagination through his young adult life. I think it's a harsh criticism.

"The book is really interesting. It's been inspired by many things that over the centuries have inspired the human race, from Norse and Greek mythology up to the modern-day stories of *Star Wars*. You can see how Chris Paolini was inspired by all these things and soaked them up. He's a sponge that absorbed all this knowledge and was able to weave his own tale from all those things. The book is a combination of many things that have inspired people over the centuries and in its own way is doing the same."

In the world Paolini created, Alagaesia is a country ruled by King Galbatorix (played by John Malkovich of *Shadow of the Vampire* and *Being John Malkovich*), who was once a heroic dragonrider. But when a horrible tragedy took the life of his own dragon, Galbatorix went mad and wreaked his own vengeful havoc. As king, he's determined to rid his nation of all dragons and dragonriders. Therefore, when Eragon chooses to keep and raise Saphira instead of turning her over to the king's henchmen, it's a huge risk that places Eragon, Saphira, Brom, and everyone who helps them in grave and constant danger.

Eragon learns from Brom that when baby dragons are still in the egg, they have the ability to choose their riders. This means that when Eragon found the dragon egg from which Saphira hatches, she had already chosen him as her future rider. That's the reason why her egg landed in Eragon's hands. Eragon didn't find Saphira's egg; while still inside the egg, Saphira found him.

Although Eragon is excited at the prospect of adventure, he knows it won't be an easy road. With Brom's help, he travels across Alagaesia in search of the fabled dragonriders in hiding, not knowing if they will accept Eragon or even help him.

"I think there are many reasons why the book is inspiring to vast numbers of readers," Gabler says. "I have my own theories about that. The idea that Eragon is initially a reluctant hero then assumes the mantle of his destiny is a feeling that many young people have as they're starting to enter adulthood. They don't know what the future is going to bring for them. They're a little terrified of it. They're torn between wanting to be independent and heroic and do great things in the world, and yet they're not sure what it means to achieve their dreams. In the biggest fantasy sense, Eragon's being destined to be the last of this great race of dragonriders is inspirational. Yet, what does that mean? What does it mean to

Win Eragon's Sword!
[illegible] at www.[illegible].com
[illegible] to win an officially licensed, beautifully crafted sword from the movie.

In Stores Now
eragon
Fulfill the legend of the Dragon Rider.
eragongame.com
PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE
TEEN
T
Blood
Mild Language
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING
www.esrb.org
NINTENDO DS
GAME BOY ADVANCE
SIERRA

leave your family and go off into a strange new world—I think all those things are emotionally identifiable That's Eragon's psychological makeup To me, all that stuff is really touching a deep, deep core in the psyche of many young readers "

Unlike J K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, where each is filmed so that it mirrors each book as closely as possible, Gabler admits that many changes had to be made to Paolini's lengthy novel

"It's hard to take a book of that size and turn it into a movie that's under two hours," Gabler says. "There were sections that had to be condensed There were characters that had to be left out There were elements of the book that had to be somewhat reinvented We tried to stay as close to the spirit as we could "

Brom (Jeremy Irons) teaches Eragon how to fight and serves as his mentor

Although Paolini was busy writing *The Eldest* during the filming of *Eragon*, the filmmakers often consulted him, especially when they needed advice about the languages he's invented for his world They also kept close tabs about the design and portrayal of one of the most important characters in his novel—Saphira

Because Saphira is key to Eragon's success, it's no accident that first-time director Stefen Fangmeier is also a world-renowned visual effects supervisor He worked for George Lucas's Industrial Light & Magic for many years, and Fangmeier's credits range from *Jurassic Park* to *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Thanks to a technology that continues to grow in leaps and bounds, Fangmeier is confident in his ability to create a lifelike and realistic dragon. The goal is to stay far away from anything resembling a cartoon It's lucky that Eragon and Saphira communicate telepathically—this fact guarantees that Saphira will not talk and her lips won't move Instead, the emphasis will be on her acting skills

"I think the idea of having this female counterpart in Saphira the dragon is also something that is tapping into an emotional core " Gabler says. "because she's a partner that Eragon finds and they grow up together She starts out as this young hatchling that he has to protect, and then ultimately she becomes this amazing warrior by his side, and they save each other Saphira and Eragon bicker with each other She's got a funny sense of humor She's also this amazing, fire-breathing beast that can go into battle, and he's the rider

In addition to creating Saphira, one of the greatest challenges the filmmakers faced was finding a young actor to play Eragon, who is 15 in Paolini's novel. After conducting a worldwide search, they came up short Although they saw many good young actors none captured the spirit of Eragon The clock was ticking and the start date for filming was approaching fast. A last-minute casting call unearthed newcomer Ed Speleers (pronounced spuh-LEERS), who was a 17-year-old English schoolboy at the time

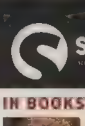
"It was really pretty scary down to the minute there." Gabler says about discovering Speleers "But he's a really talented young actor He's extremely handsome and charismatic on screen

Prior to starring in *Eragon*, Speleers had

SOLARIS

The sensational new science fiction, fantasy and dark fantasy imprint from BL Publishing

IN BOOKSTORES FEBRUARY 07

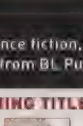


THE SOLARIS BOOK OF NEW SCIENCE FICTION
Edited by George Mann
978 1 84416 468-6
$7 99 US / $9 99 CAN
All-new stories from the world's greatest science fiction writers, including Peter F Hamilton, Mike Resnick, Stephen Baxter, and many more.

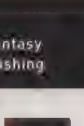
THE SUMMONER
Gail Martin
978 1 84416-468-4
$7 99 US / $9 99 CAN
Macbeth meets *The Sixth Sense* in the first book of a stunning new fantasy epic, in the grand tradition of Robert Jordan and Robin Hobb.

FORTHCOMING TITLES

DEADSTOCK
A PUNKTOWN NOVEL
Jeffrey Thomas
In the teeming future city known as Punktown a private investigator with chameleon-like abilities hunts down an escaped genetic experiment



DANTE'S GIRL
Natasha Rhodes
A dark, sexy, adventure-filled novel that explores the supernatural underbelly of life in contemporary LA.



THIEF-WITH NO SHADOW
Emily Gee
When her brother is kidnapped, Meltke—a wraith girl—must steal a priceless treasure from a monster's lair in this rich, romantic fantasy

For more information and free first chapters visit
WWW.SOLARISBOOKS.COM

LOOK OUT FOR NOVELS AND STORIES FROM:
Brian Aldiss • Neal Asher • Ben Bova • Stephen Baxter • Keith Brooke • Eric Brown • Greg van Eekhout • Paul Di Filippo • Emily Gee • David Gerrold • Peter F Hamilton • Simon Ings • Jay Lake • James Lovegrove • Brian Lumley • Gail Martin • Mike Resnick • Natasha Rhodes • John Roberts • Jeffrey Thomas • Mary Turzillo • Ian Watson

JOURNEY TO NEW LANDS
WITH THESE GREAT ADVENTURES!
Quill Award Nominee!
JONATHAN STROUD
ARTEMIS FOWL
THE LAST SIEGE
JONATHAN STROUD
JONATHAN STROUD

appeared only in school plays. Granted, those school plays included heavy hitting dramas ranging from *Hamlet* to *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and Speleers has known from the time he was 12 that he wants to make his living as an actor. Maybe that's why he's already being compared to Orlando Bloom.

Once he was cast as Eragon, Speleers left his English boarding school for Budapest, trading a traditional education for physical training that included horseback riding lessons and learning how to use a sword. Because he was cast at the last minute, Speleers dove headfirst into his role and soon found himself working alongside legendary actors. Speleers describes his co-stars as some of the greatest people we've got on the silver screen at the moment.

Almost in his first week of work, he was in scenes with Jeremy Irons and Robert Carlyle. [*The Full Monty*.]" Gabler says. "That would be daunting for anyone. But they took him under their wing and were really supportive. We had a fabulous cast for him. He rose to the occasion. He was really hard working. He was completely professional, always. Every minute he was giving it 300 percent."

Speleers talks about his experience working with well-known actors. "One of the challenges was to prove to myself and them that I'm not going to be outclassed by them. I'm not going to try to outclass them, but I don't want to seem like a much weaker link. I want to seem like we're working as a partnership."

While Speleers was thrust into a position that would cause most heads to swell, he seems to have kept his perspective. "I am the lead guy in this—I sort of carry it. But at the same time, I think, 'Well, hang on, it's a team effort.' I had immense people around me, day in, day out. I had great producers behind me. I had great actors behind me. The crew—I was blown away by them. The people on the crew said, 'As a team, you'll never work with a crew like that again.' They were amazing. I had such fun, and they kept me going."

Speleers remembers a time when they were filming at the location chosen for the Varden dragonriders' hidden home, an enormous set that was built in the crater of an extinct volcano. "We had some nights where it would be in the middle of Hungary, in the middle of a crater, 3 in the morning and -7 degrees. I was missing home—I'd been away for three-and-a-half months. I was a bit tired, and I'd have a scene to do. And I'd have the crew come up and have a laugh with me. It just meant a bit of a giggle, and it would get me going again. That was one of the things that made me think, it is a team effort. It's not about me carrying weight on my shoulders. Part of me wants to do that, because that's the sort of character I am. I'm determined to do it all and to show people I can act a bit and improve my craft. But if I didn't have that sort of team around me, I think I would have struggled a lot more."

The similarities between Speleers and the character Eragon are easy to appreciate. Both leave the safety and comfort of familiar surroundings at a moment's notice, launching into an adventure that leads to meeting new people and having exciting experiences. So how does Speleers compare himself to the role he plays?

With tongue in cheek, he says, "There's the obvious difference that I had a German shepherd as my companion during filming, and Eragon had a dragon. The similarities are we're young guys who don't have a particular goal in life—you just want to get through things. It's Hollywood for me, and for Eragon it's being a dragonrider. Both are taken on these amazing adventures that Eragon could not imagine in Alagaesia, neither could I imagine in Hungary, Slovakia, Canada, and Pinewood Studios [in London]."

One potential problem that Speleers is bound to face is being over-identified with Eragon. "I think it's any actor's concern when they start in a position like Daniel Radcliffe did or I like I have, or Elijah Wood. It's down to us as individuals to prove to the world that people have got to look past that. It's not down to the audience, it's down to me for the next role I take to show I'm doing something different.

"Obviously, I'm going to look like the same guy, but it's down to me to develop a character so people won't say, 'He's just doing

ARMS OF VALOUR

www.armsofvalour.com

High Quality Medieval & Fantasy Swords, Armor & Clothing

Our **Battle-Ready Ranger Sword** is fully functional with a razor sharp hand-forged tempered 1060 high carbon spring steel blade, solid steel crossguard & pommel and comes with a wooden scabbard covered with leather ($239)

Medieval, Renaissance, and Fantasy Clothing Create a personalized historical or fantasy ensemble! Combined with our leather accessories, armor and weapons you can be the guy or gal everyone admires at the Ren Fair or costume party. The clothing we offer is not costume quality! They are made to withstand everyday wear and tear as the originals!

Be sure to check out our full line of battle-ready swords, bows, arrows, and medieval/fantasy clothing!

Whether a collector, re-enactor, or fan of the latest blockbuster movie (Pirates of the Caribbean, Lord of the Rings), Arms of Valor Ltd. has what you are looking for in replica swords, armor, and clothing. We carry exact replicas of movie props as well as historically accurate reproductions of museum pieces.

Visit us online at: www.armsofvalour.com or call toll free: 1-888-477-9673

STAR WARS
MINIATURES

...new Imperial *Strategy Battles* is a stand-alone game ...Millennium Falcon ...Set includes two exclusive, Darth Vader's ... and the massive Mon Calamari Star Defender *Viscount*.

ILM and WETA created ground-breaking special effects for the movie

what he did in *Eragon*." Whether that means I need to go and have a couple of years in drama school or I've just got to take my time and think things through before making a hasty decision about what I do next, who knows?

"But I'm very determined to last in this world—this is the only one I want to be part of the film industry or the acting industry. I've got no better critic than myself. I know if I'm going along the wrong lines of staying in the same old mold, and if there's a problem, I'll try to adjust it. But I want to prove to the world that I want to be as good as I can. And I'm not talking for the short term. I'd love it if in years and years and years to come, people remember what I've done in my life. But in order for me to do that, I've got a lot of work to do. And I've got a lot of keeping my feet firmly on the ground."

For now, like everyone else who has worked on *Eragon*, Speleers is anxious to see what the dragon Saphira looks like onscreen. After all, the success of the movie may be riding on her back.

"The challenge for me has been the process of the effects with making the dragon as compelling as possible and making the battle and flying sequences as exciting as possible," Gabler says. "It's been really groundbreaking as far as both ILM and WETA, the effects house in New Zealand, doing the movie. Remember that the dragon is a major character. It's not just an effects thing—it's not a monster. It's a character that has to have expressions. Any time you turn the camera to that character, it's a very, very expensive thing, because you can't just pick up a shot of an actress talking. It's incredibly detailed and involved. The process is daunting.

If that process succeeds, *Eragon* may be the first movie of the next big fantasy film series, joining the ranks of *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. So far, Fox has focused its efforts entirely on completing *Eragon*. If successful, it's very likely Paolini's other books will be translated to film, as well. While Speleers apparently hasn't been committed to star in future films as Eragon, he's ready to do so. In the meantime, he just wants to see the movie he's made.

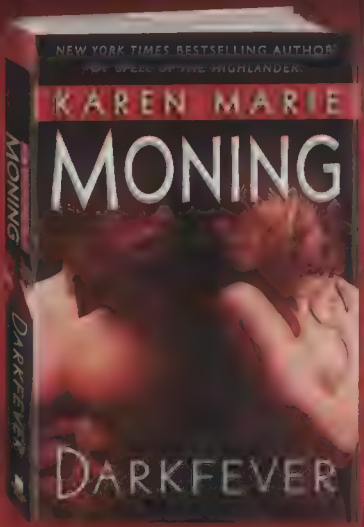
"I've seen very small clips," Speleers says about *Eragon*. "I was at San Diego at the Comic-Con. They showed a two-minute trailer, and I was blown away, like any other kid would be. I'm like how my friends are with movies. I'm desperate. I can't wait till it's out." ❧

THE FIRST NOVEL IN A NEW SERIES FROM
THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
OF THE HIGHLANDER NOVELS

MacKayla Lane
has come to Ireland to solve
her sister's murder.
Her only clue leads her into
a forbidden world
seductive
dangerous.

that allows her to see into the realm
of the Fae, demonic lovers who
seduce and destroy
without mercy.

and even though she knows she should
the temptation is too great.



The novels of
KAREN MARIE MONING

"Darkly sensual." "Pulsing with sexual tension."

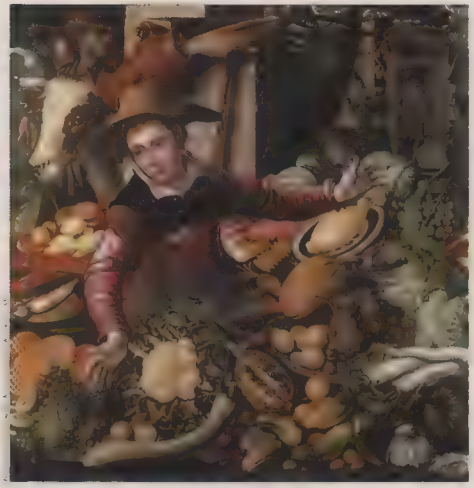
"Exhilarating."

FEEL THE HEAT. CATCH THE FEVER.

By Midori Snyder

Hail to the cook, who has the power to transform through the magic of food.

Let's begin with a memory. I am nine or ten years old, shivering with terror in my bed at night. A violent storm rattles the windows, the lightning sharp and sizzling, thunder a chest-rattling roar in the darkness. Skeletal branches frantically lash the panes. I have read too much Beowulf for my own good, and I am prepared at every blinding flash of lightning for the sight of the hulking monster Grendel. But another sound soon catches my ear. Pots are clanging, cupboard doors are opening, and cutlery is churning. My father is in the kitchen in the middle of the night, cooking a spell to soothe the terrors of the storm. I listen eagerly and there it is—the staccato tattoo of the knife on the chopping block, the sizzle of heated oil, and at once the house is filled with the pungent reek of garlic. Bedroom doors open, and the rest of the family, as if called, leave their beds and gather in the kitchen to wait out the storm-tossed night while my father cooks.



Cooks are powerful alchemists who transform all sorts of ingredients into sublime dishes. The painting is Market Woman at a Vegetable Stand *by Pieter Aertsen, 1567*

Outside the storm rages, but inside in the warmth of the kitchen, my father is committing an act of sorcery on fresh tomatoes. How else to spell away the darkness than to evoke all the ingredients of a sunlit summer's day—the green-gold olive oil, the peppery scent of garden tomatoes, the tart juice of parsley leaves? And garlic, lots of garlic. With drowsy expressions, my mother and brother sit at the table, chins resting on their upturned palms, while my cousin, visiting from France, opens a bottle and pours glasses of wine (mine diluted with a little water). My father moves around the kitchen, a wizard carefully arranging the components of a complicated spell, murmuring in a soft voice, throwing ingredients into the pan erupting with curlicues of smoke and a commanding aroma. Watching the deft movements of his hands, his face nearly invisible in the gathering steam, I can forget the storm outside. When the fat globes of Tomates à la Provençale, their flanks glistening with oil, are spooned at last on my plate, I am aware that the storm has moved on, grudgingly perhaps, for I am sure that if it could it would have joined us, happy enough to take the bread and soak up oil, herbs, and the golden seeds swimming in the soft pulp of the tomatoes. I lick my fingers and, sleepy once more, return to bed, the oil around my mouth staining the pillowcase.

The very best of cooks are wizards and tricksters. They must be, for they are capable of powerful acts of transformation. All manner of life, mammal, aquatic, vegetable, seeds, and nuts, passes through their hands and is transformed by spells—some secret, some written in books annotated with splashes of grease and broth. Years after his death, I am still convinced I can take my father's stained, handwritten recipes, dip them in hot water, and there will be enough residue of the dish on those pages to create consommé. Master cooks are powerful alchemists—or sorcerers, like Circe, who was capable of turning men into swine with her cooking. They are skilled in the art of turning gnarled root vegetables into

Eos Books—The Next Chapter

Land of Mist and Snow

Debra Doyle and James D. Macdonald

As the War Between the States rages, two ships battle, one fueled by good magic, the other by blood sacrifice—and a young naval lieutenant gets caught up in the epic struggle.

ISBN 0-06-081919-7 $7.99 ($10.99 Can.) Mass Market

Bridge of Souls

The Quickening
Book Three
Fiona McIntosh

"Vibrant and engaging...An intricately plotted tale of love and politics, set against the backdrop of a rich fantasy realm with interesting magic, and peopled with characters whom the reader grows to care about."

—Kirkus Reviews
(Starred Review)

ISBN 0-06-074761-7 $7.99 ($10.99 Can.) Mass Market

The Diamond Isle

Book Three of
The Dreamtime
Stan Nicholls

"A suitably complex and nicely written new fantasy series. Good sword and sorcery."

—San Diego Union-Tribune

ISBN 0-06-073893-6 $14.95 ($18.95 Can.) Trade Paperback

Voice of the Gods

Age of the Five:
Book Three
Trudi Canavan

The third book in a thrilling new epic fantasy trilogy from *USA Today* bestselling author Trudi Canavan about a young woman who becomes an avatar of the gods.

ISBN 0-06-081592-2 $7.99 ($10.99 Can.) Mass Market

Be sure to check out **www.eosbooks.com** for the latest news on all Science Fiction and Fantasy titles from HarperCollins Publishers. While there, sign up for our e-newsletter ***Inside Eos*** to get updates and exclusive material. Heard rumors? Read them first on our blog at **www.outoftheseos.com.**

a whipped froth of a purée, hazelnuts into digestive liqueur, a secret combination of spices and chilies into a mole paste that burns and soothes at the same time. From a bin brimming with hundreds of choices they can sense the ripe cantaloupe, the juicy peach, and the blueberries that have lingered long enough on the bush to become sweet. I am in awe of their skill, their secret knowledge, the inexplicable way I can follow my father's recipe and not have it taste anything like his, missing that one secret ingredient that transformed his dish into something sublime.

Perhaps because the cook, like other ambiguous archetypes, functions as catalyst of transformation, myths and fairy tales are filled with all manner of cooks, some creatively heroic and others deeply villainous. And it is the villains that come first to mind because their concept of cooking provokes such a shocking contrast to our usual expectations. For them, cooking is an act of violence and destruction. It is not about nurturing, but revenge, obliteration, and murder. There are the giants whose cooking skills lean toward the basic grinding of "his bones to make my bread." There are the jealous stepmothers pulling their recipes from black-magic cookbooks to make poisoned apples and toxic teas. And there are the truly terrifying cannibal cooks, who in their jealous rages extract hearts and livers from their stepchildren to make stews which they feed to an unsuspecting parent. The stepmother of "The Juniper Tree" makes a soup of the body of her stepson, seasoned by the salty tears of his traumatized sister who has witnessed the crime. In Shakespeare's play *Titus Andronicus*, the deposed Roman general Titus makes a towering meat pie from the bodies of the Goth Queen Tamora's sons and serves it to her in revenge for her sons' brutal rape and mutilation of his daughter.

Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527-1593) portrayed Emperor Rudolph II as Vertumnus, the Roman god of vegetation and transformation

Among the Xhosa of South Africa we find tales of the Zim, man-eating monsters that dine regularly on human flesh, sometimes even their own children. One story tells of Zim parents whose child is born half sweet, half sour. The parents promptly devour the sweet side, leaving their child a fast-moving, one-legged creature with a voracious appetite, hoping to regain its full body in the consumption of humans. Tricksters in African narratives often use cooking to outwit these formidable monsters. One clever trickster convinces the cannibal grandmother that he is too stupid to figure out how to get into the pot. Frustrated, she demonstrates by climbing into the seasoned water. Once inside the pot, Trickster slams down the lid and promptly turns up the heat. It is not enough that he cooks the old monster in her own broth, but he disguises himself as the grandmother, and when her grandchildren show up for the midday meal, he ladles out her bits and pieces to them. What follows is a hilarious question and answer dialogue as the grandchildren become suspicious. "But this looks like my grandmother's eye," one says looking at the con-

"In my fantasies, all of my dolls could fly. All of them were magic."

Wendy's sculptures have attracted and inspired many great artists of our time, the foremost being George Lucas, for whom she fabricated "Yoda" and Jim Henson, with whom she worked on his classic films, THE DARK CRYSTAL and LABYRINTH.

Featuring photography by her husband, international best-selling faery artist, Brian Froud and a foreword by Oscar winner Richard Taylor of the Weta Workshop, THE ART OF WENDY FROUD is assured to be a welcome and beloved addition to the book collection of any lover of Faery or fantasy.

THE ART OF WENDY FROUD

An Imaginosis Book

9" x 11" hardcover; 80 full color pages

SPECIAL PUBLICATION OFFER!

For information on the exclusive publication offer available only from Imaginosis, please visit: worldoffroud.com

tents of her spoon. "And this looks like my grandmother's foot," whines the other. "Eat your food," the Trickster grandmother orders, and they do.

Another trickster cook performs a feat of magical transformation when he manages to turn a tight-fisted old farm couple into passably good cooks, generous with the chicken broth, barely, and vegetables. On a blustery night, a wanderer begs a little shelter at a cottage door, and while the farmer and his wife reluctantly allow the man to stay the night, they are not about to share their food with him. That is, until he offers to teach them how to make "stone soup," a meal that will require a pot of water, and a magic stone which he pulls out of his pocket. Intrigued, the stingy couple eagerly provides the pot and water. In due time, the wanderer tastes the soup and makes mild suggestions of how its flavor might be improved. "You know, some carrots might make this even tastier," he offers, licking the spoon. The couple, their thoughts trained only on the promise of soup from stones, hand over carrots, potatoes, flour, barley, and chicken broth, while quietly congratulating themselves for discovering a cheap way to make soup. When the meal (which has been sublime) is done and the pot is empty, the wanderer removes the stone, licks it clean of fat, and replaces it in his pocket. The farmer and his wife, satiated by the gift of good food, are too content to realize they have been duped.

"A good cook is like a sorceress who dispenses happiness."
— Elsa Schiaperelli

"What does cookery mean? It means the knowledge of Medea and of Circe, and of Calypso, and Sheba."
— John Ruskin

"Everything you see I owe to spaghetti."
— Sophia Loren

For me, the Russian wood-witch Baba Yaga is the most powerful of the ambiguous and transformative cooks in the fairy tale tradition. She straddles the threshold between life and death, between the promise of change and the imminent threat of destruction, between learning to cook a meal or becoming the meal. This is no sugar-coated, one-dimensional Gingerbread House witch. Baba Yaga is a potent mix of domestic and fantastic—a potential helper to the hero or heroine in the guise of a ferocious grandmother with iron teeth and wicked claws. Her house is surrounded by a fence of human bones and lit by lanterns made from the skulls of her previous meals. We know we are in the presence of a magical cook for the house rests on chicken legs (a key ingredient of any good soup) that lift and carry it to different locations, reinforcing Baba Yaga's ambiguity: the domestic combined with the dangerous, the tame with the wild, the oddity in a cannibal's household of using chicken legs for transport and human beings for dinner. The witch flies through the sky in a mortar, flailing its pestle like an oar, and her choice of weapon (beyond those great teeth and long nails) is the oven. "I eat the overcurious," she warns. Woe to the girl who stumbles into her path unable to cook, to separate wheat from chaff or poppy seeds from grit. But as Vasilissa the Wise proves by her encounter with Baba Yaga (in a classic Russian folk tale), this difficult cook can be appeased, cajoled by good manners and dinner on the witch's table at the end of a long day's flying.

As I've grown older, I've come to understand Baba Yaga, so in love with youth as to desire to consume it, to keep it close. When children who were once our flesh and whose young lives we stirred and seasoned like a simmering pot begin to demand their independence, it can seem like the threat of future starvation. As my daughter approached sixteen years of age I was jolted by the realization that I was now too long past youth to identify with the fairy tale journeys of young women. My rites of passage had become deeper, closer to the bone, and were hedging toward the eternal. To walk on a busy street with my daughter was to disappear in her lovely shadow. I could almost feel the iron tusks erupt from my mouth, the long claws dragging at my fingertips. I wrote about this cannibal hunger, this monstrous motherly cooking in my poem "Baba Yaga," confessing:

"My daughter when you were small
How I wanted to eat you
Cast off flesh of my flesh
I wanted to keep you in me,
Digest my fear of losing you as I swallowed
You whole, plumped and roasted
Can you forgive the way
I fretted over the oven
And took the measure of your
Wrists with my worried fingers?'

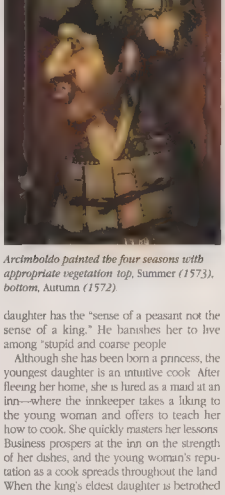
Yet my daughter comes from a long line of cooks and knew the answer lay not in repudiating me, but in offering a different meal to soothe my hunger and my loss. After two years of living in Costa Rica she wrote a reply in a poem of her own, "Baba Yaga's Daughter."

Old Woman! You are wasting away!
Those eyes that once crackled bright
in your little cottage
seem opal cold through aged, pursed lids
I will warm you with a dinner and
spiced herbal cider
Won't you be stunned to see,
in your weakened state, Old Woman
that I have brought more than fish'
I will teach you, now that you have

burned your old recipes,
the new ones I remedied
And I will uncover the hidden plants
I've stashed in my hair,
the worlds I have in my mouth,
the tattoos woven in my skin
and the sky I discovered in my breast.
Old Woman, this will surely be your
finest meal

Thus, we must offer praise to the cooks who know the creative power of their magic to replace hunger with contentment, alienation with intimacy, and anguish with joy. Every night among the Norse gods, Andhrimnir, the cook of Valhalla, prepares a rejuvenating meal for the Einherjar, the heroic dead who have died in great battles. He cooks to perfection the massive wild boar, Sæhrimnir, in his cooking pot, Eldhrimnir. And each night, though they feast on Sæhrimnir, by morning of the next day the wild boar has become whole, ready to be cooked again. In many variants of the fairy tale "Donkeyskin" and "Tattercoats," the young woman disguised as a dirty scullery maid takes over the job of preparing the prince's meal while the cook dashes upstairs to view the arrival of the regal entourage. Into the soup the girl tosses not only her own selection of spices, but also her golden ring. The prince eats the soup hungrily, captivated by its original flavor, and discovers the ring at the bottom of the dish. Cinderella may have danced her way in glass slippers at the ball, but it is Tattercoats's skill as a cook that brings the prince down to the kitchens to find her.

Good cooks know the value of their ingredients as they know the value of their own heart. In a German tale, "The Most Indispensable Thing" (also known as "Love Like Salt" and "As Dear As Salt"), a king finds himself unable to choose which of his three young daughters should succeed him as heir to the throne. He asks each of them to bring a present that represents "the most indispensable thing" needed in life. One daughter brings a robe of majestic purple. The status-conscious king finds this an acceptable gift, for without the robes of royalty, the outward sign of his majesty, a king is merely a man, as common as any other man. He blesses and kisses his daughter. The second daughter, however, doesn't fare as well. She brings a loaf of fresh bread that she has baked herself along with a gold goblet of wine, suggestive of God's gift of food and wine, indispensable as nourishment for the body and as a sacred sign of God's love. But the king is not pleased, for he regards eating and drinking as "common" activities and a king must always distinguish himself from the masses. He blesses her for her "good will," but he will not kiss her. The third daughter fares worst of all. For she presents the king with a wooden plate loaded with pure white salt. The king is not amused. "One does not need salt," he says, and adds the further insult that his youngest



Arcimboldo painted the four seasons with appropriate vegetation top, Summer *(1573), bottom,* Autumn *(1572)*

daughter has the "sense of a peasant not the sense of a king." He banishes her to live among "stupid and coarse people."

Although she has been born a princess, the youngest daughter is an intuitive cook. After fleeing her home, she is hired as a maid at an inn—where the innkeeper takes a liking to the young woman and offers to teach her how to cook. She quickly masters her lessons. Business prospers at the inn on the strength of her dishes, and the young woman's reputation as a cook spreads throughout the land. When the king's eldest daughter is betrothed in marriage, the king decides that only the finest cook in the kingdom will prepare the wedding feast. The young woman is hired and from the palace kitchens sumptuous dishes emerge one after another, to great praise from the diners. At last the king's favorite dish is served, but contrary to the rich flavors of the other dishes, this one is bland and tasteless. The king becomes angry and demands to see the cook. The young woman appears at the hall and throws herself on the ground before the king. Before the wedding guests, he scolds her for failing to add salt to his favorite dish and thereby ruining his pleasure. "Forgive me, your majesty," the young cook replies, rising to stand before her father. "I would never have added salt to a king's dish, for once I was told that one does not need salt and that salt shows the sense of a peasant not the sense of a king." The king, recognizing his own words and his daughter, is at once humbled and chastened. Drawing the girl into his arms, he begs her forgiveness.

It is only in the act of cooking that the youngest daughter reveals the power of her gift to the king. Salt is an ingredient in cooking, not eaten alone, but used as a seasoning. A good cook, queen of her kitchens, shows the superiority of her knowledge, her "sense" in how she applies it to the meal. In another version of this tale, "Love Like Salt," the daughter proclaims that her love for her father is like the love of meat for salt. Initially insulted, it takes a while for the king to understand the appropriateness of his daughter's statement. Only when he is served a dish without salt (one that she has cooked) does he become aware of the absence of his daughter's love, a love he had taken for granted. Cooking here has the magical touch to transform a dangerously arrogant king into a humble, loving father.

"The Daughter of the Sun," an Italian tale, provides one of the most outlandish examples of the fantastic cook. A serving maid is impregnated by the Sun, gives birth, and then abandons her infant daughter in a bean field. The baby is discovered by a king, who brings the foundling home where she is raised alongside the king's own son, and the two eventually fall in love. But it is not considered an appropriate match, and the king, to disrupt the relationship, moves the girl to an isolated house deep in the forest. In time, the prince is betrothed to another, and servants travel to all the relatives bearing the news and a gift of sugared almonds. They arrive at the little house in the woods, where the daughter of the Sun begs them to wait until she has made a gift for the prince and his bride. She astonishes the king's men by commanding wood to march into her oven and ignite. Then she leaps into the flame and returns with a beautiful cake as a wedding gift. The servants return home with the cake and the castle crackles with the news of the daughter of the Sun's remarkable talent. The intended bride, upon hearing the tale from the astonished servants, boasts of a similar talent. But she, alas, is not the daughter of the Sun, and the poor creature is burned to death in the oven. The tale continues: new brides are found and each one fails to match the daughter of the Sun in culinary feats of magic—such as plunging one's fingers into boiling oil to create fried fish and brewing pap from magic barley to heal the prince of a mysterious illness. It is through her fantastic cooking skills that the heroine is revealed to be a daughter of roy-

nocturne

DARK AND SENSUAL TALES OF PARANORMAL ROMANCE

Nocturne™ titles available each month wherever books are sold, including most bookstores, supermarkets, discount stores and drugstores.

Silhouette nocturne

alty and the only legitimate bride.

Good cooks carry with them secrets locked away in the arcane languages of foods, herbs, and spices. They study their alchemical properties, creating potent combinations that not only arouse our sense of taste, but offer well-being and longevity. In India, the 5,000-year-old Ayurvedic systems of cuisine promise the knowledge for prolonging a healthy life. Through a careful combination of spices and foods, the system seeks to balance the six rasas or "tastes" of the Ayurvedic diet: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent. The proper Ayurvedic mix delivers a sensual, Tantric experience of food. The Ayurvedic physician prepares meals in accordance with the seasons, the freshness of the food available, and the individual's health needs. The cook is a physician and spiritual director, using the spiritual and physical properties of the food to enrich the consumer's life.

Wood-witch Baba Yaga walks the line between learning to cook and becoming the meal her oven is her weapon.

Lasse Hallström offers a fairy tale version of this ancient science in his film *Chocolat* (was there ever a food given more magical properties?), based on the novel of the same name by Joanne Harris. Juliette Binoche play a mysterious stranger who arrives at a sleepy village during a wild storm. Although Lent has started, she opens a "chocolaterie," a small store filled with sublime candy, directly opposite the church. With an uncanny wisdom, she knows which confection will unravel the private misery of her reluctant buyers. Before long, her enchanted chocolates have transformed the lives of the villagers, rekindling passion in a dull marriage, providing the needed courage for an abused housewife to leave her violent husband, and a spirit of loving acceptance to a bitter landlady. In Laura Esquivel's delicious novel of magical cooking, *Like Water for Chocolate* (complete with recipes), and the movie made from it, the narrator's great aunt Tita is born in the middle of the kitchen table amid the spices and fixings for the noodle soup. Preparing food becomes a way of life for the child and Tita grows up to become a master chef. As she cooks, her own emotions mingle with the food and the diners are taken by sudden bouts of longing, regret, and passion. Quail cooked in a delectable rose petal sauce causes her sister Gertrudis to become so inflamed with lust that her body produces unquenchable heat. Water evaporates before it can cool her, and her scent, carried on pink clouds, attracts the object of her passion, one of Pancho Villa's men, who arrives in time to pull the naked Gertrudis up in front of him on a galloping horse, allowing the lovers to face each other as they ride away to conjugal bliss. Like the bystander in the film *When Harry Met Sally* who witnesses the famous scene of Meg Ryan as Sally faking an orgasm in a crowded restaurant, we want to lean over to the cook and demand, "I'll take whatever she's having!"

More recently the alchemy of cooking has given way to a new and perplexing science of food that is no less magical in its ability to transform our sense of taste and propriety when it comes to cooking. Molecular Gastronomy, a term coined in the 1980s by French scientist Hervé This and Nicolas Kurti, a professor of physics at Oxford University in England, has sought to unravel the deep chemical structures of food and to discover the science beneath home cooking. Studying more than ten thousand adages and myths about cooking, these two scientists set out to prove or disprove these long-cherished maxims. (I remember my French grandmère insisting that it was impossible for a menstruating woman to make mayonnaise; the oil and the eggs would not blend.) Along the way to collecting empirical data they inadvertently established a new realm of cooking possibilities. Foods that have similar molecular structures can be combined to produce fantastic and unexpectedly compatible flavors such as garlic and coffee creme brulée, dark chocolate petit fours infused with pipe tobacco, barnacles with tea foam, a cappuccino of forest mushrooms with mushroom biscotti. Heroic young chefs are now determined to change the traditional expectations of diners. Heston Blumenthal, chef at the Fat Duck restaurant at Bray-on-Thames in England, has produced award-winning combinations of caviar and white chocolate, spice bread ice cream and crab syrup, and smoked bacon and egg ice cream served with French toast and tomato jam. Chef Richard Blais, an innovative chef in Atlanta, conjures mustard ice cream tableside by mixing custard with liquid nitrogen. In Houston, Chef Randy Rucker says his goal is to serve food the city "has never seen, ever" with items such as cod served with white chocolate sauce. In Miami, Chef Gerdy Rodriguez has been experimenting with bread ice cream, gelatin paper wraps, and tomato foam.

It makes me dizzy, these new spells, and I wonder what will be the results of such incantations on the adventurous diners. Will they be enchanted or ensorcelled? Of course I will try such strange delights at least once should I have the opportunity. But for now, I linger on a last memory, looking backward at the magic of older cooks. I visited my father a month before he died. We were, as always, in the kitchen and he wanted to make Champignons à la Grecque, a simple dish and one that I loved. Usually I sat perched on a stool, watching his swift hands, the spices tossed in without the benefit of measuring, a certain bottle of wine upended with a flourish, some of it poured into the cook and some into the pot. But this time he was tired and I was the apprentice, following his direction while he sat and watched. It was one of the most poignant moments of my life. Nothing else would have moved him to relinquish his position at stove except the knowledge of his impending death. I listened to his instructions and heard the underlying melancholy in his voice as I chopped, tossed, and stirred. What a final gift this was as I learned the spell that turned the mushrooms into fragrant golden morsels. We ate then, a quiet dinner by candlelight, and for a brief time all the fears, all the anxiety attending the gathering storm of his last days subsided, rolled back by the enchantment of good food. ❧

Fiction

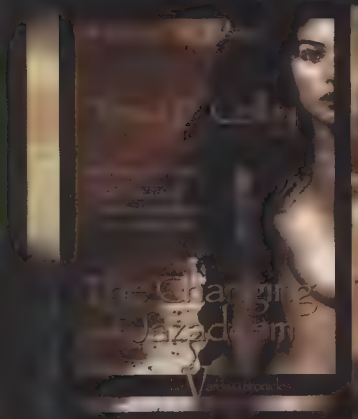
Coyote Cowgirl by Kim Antieau (Forge 2004)
The Devil's Larder by Jim Grace (FSG 2001)
Like Water for Chocolate by Laura Esquivel (Doubleday, 1992)
Chocolat by Joanna Harris (Viking, 1999)
The Vintner's Luck by Elizabeth Knox (FSG 1998)
The Stars Dispose by Michaela Roessner (Tor Books 1998)
The Stars Compel by Michaela Roessner (Tor Books, 1999)
The Rituals of Dinner by Margaret Visser (Grove Press, 1991)

Film

Like Water for Chocolate directed by Alfonso Arau (1993)
Babette's Feast directed by Gabriel Axel (1998)
Chocolat directed by Lasse Hallstrom (2001)
Eat Drink Man Woman directed by Ang Lee (1994)
Simply Irresistible directed by Mark Tarlov (1999)

The Varda Chronicles

From the Mind of Tessa E. Colby



This is where our story begins...
and it is a story unlike any other...
A fantastic story never before told...

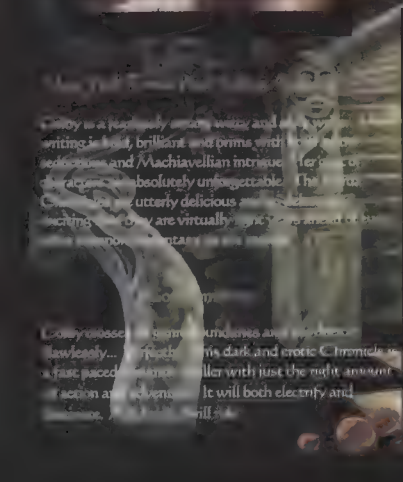
Step through the portal and enter a world of
dark seductions, passion.... and sensual things

A world of deadly enemies,
revenge and obsession... and dark desire

Join in the Adventure of

The Varda Chro

Visit Colby's exciting new world
on-line at
www.tessaecolby.com



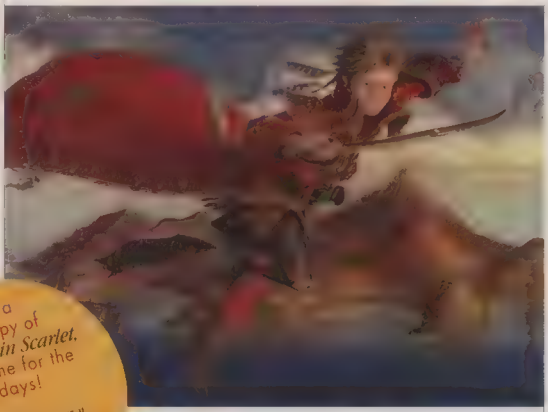
By Gahan Wilson & Paul Witcover

Peter Pan flies again in the first authorized sequel to James M. Barrie's beloved story.

Just about everyone, both old and young, has experienced and fallen in love with the story of Peter Pan and his Lost Boys in one format or another—play, TV production, animated movie, etc. James M. Barrie introduced Peter Pan in 1902 in his novel *The Little White Bird, Or Adventures in Kensington Gardens*. The novel was followed in 1904 with a stage play entitled *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up*. The play took on new life in 1911 when Barrie published *Peter and Wendy*, a novel for children based on the play.

Although Paramount Pictures released a film version of *Peter Pan* in 1924, and Disney came out with an animated film in 1953, most of the American baby boomers had their first Tinker Bell sighting on television in 1960. Actress Mary Martin had starred as Peter—with Cyril Richard as Captain Hook—in the Tony Award-winning musical version of the play. Mary Martin was part of a longtime tradition of an adult female portraying Peter that has continued to this day. Other actresses who portrayed Peter include Mia Farrow, in Hallmark Hall of Fame in 1976; Sandy Duncan, on Broadway in 1979; and gymnast Cathy Rigby, on stage and television.

Best-selling author and illustrator Tony DiTerlizzi captured Peter Pan in flight for the cover of Peter Pan in Scarlet. *Scott M. Fischer's charming chapter opening illustrations add to the sequel's Edwardian appeal.*



In recent years, Steven Spielberg's 1991 film *Hook* was a sequel to the original story. Robin Williams plays an adult Peter who is lured back to Neverland to battle Captain Hook (Dustin Hoffman), who has kidnapped Peter's two young children. *Finding Neverland*, released in 2004, stars Johnny Depp as J.M. Barrie and Kate Winslet as Sylvia Llwelyn Davies, whose children were Barrie's inspiration for Peter Pan.

It is safe to say that Peter Pan has never been out of fashion and the story has been represented in almost every medium—from comic books to video games to popular songs—in every decade since Barrie wrote the story. The story has been referenced in such diverse productions as Joel Schumacher's 1987 film *The*

Win a free copy of *Peter Pan in Scarlet*, just in time for the holidays!

All you have to do is register at www.rotmagazine.com for a chance to win one of 50 copies. Don't miss this wonderful opportunity to own your own copy.

By The Sword, Inc.

Quality Reproductions

Arms, Armor, Clothing and More

By The Sword, Inc. is one of the largest Medieval - Renaissance dealers in the U.S. carrying 1000's of exciting products. You can feel safe and assured ordering from our established firm. Our warehouse facilities allow our customers fast delivery on their orders! We've supplied major motion pictures, theme parks, Renaissance weddings, LARP events, theatrical plays, re-enactment groups and of course home decorators and collectors. We can accommodate any budget!

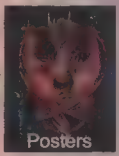
Order Toll Free: 877-433-9368
24 hours, 7 days a week!
Questions: 888-244-3263
Mon.-Fri. 9:00am-5:00pm est.

Visa, Discover, MasterCard, American Express, PayPal

http://www.bytheswordinc.com

By The Sword, Inc. P.O. Box 07282 Ft. Myers, FL 33919

Historic and Fantasy Weapons



Posters

Figurines

Shields

Battle Ready Leather Armour

Realistic LARP Armour

CLASSIC SAMURAI

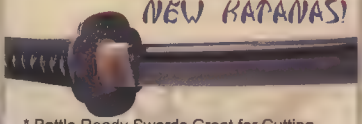
NEW KATANAS!

Ronin Series

Samurai Series

Shogun Series

Dragon Series



- Battle Ready Swords Great for Cutting
- Fully Sharpened carbon steel blades
- Heat-treated to a spring temper
- Traditional sword fitting materials
- Finely crafted black iron Tsubas
- Genuine Ray Skin Samé
- Traditional cord wrappings and Menuki
- Includes Black Lacquered Wood Sheath
- Dark Blue fully lined cotton sword bag

家明民

Available From
http://www.bytheswordinc.com

Toll Free 888-244-3263
Fax 239-433-9128

Lost Boys and Kate Bush's song, "In Search of Peter Pan".

Peter Pan has not been absent in the literary world, either. R. Scott Bakker's wood's *Neverland: The Early Adventures of Peter Pan* (2001) is a prequel that answers 17 questions about Peter's life before he met the Darling children. Humorist Dave Barry and suspense writer Ridley Pearson collaborated on *Peter and the Starcatchers*, an unofficial prequel to the story of Peter and Wendy, set on a ship called *Never Land*. Karen Wallace's *Wendy*, published in 2004, is another prequel that supposes that the Darling children flew away with Peter to escape an unhappy life filled with abuse and tragedy. The authorized prequel *Capt Hook*, by James V. Hart, co-writer of the movie *Hook* focuses on young James Matthew, who grew up to be Peter Pan's nemesis.

There have also been a number of sequels, both authorized and unauthorized. Gilbert Adair's *Peter Pan and the Only Children* (1987) finds Peter living at the bottom of the ocean with a new group of Lost Boys, gathered as they fall off passing ships. *After the Rain: A New Adventure for Peter Pan*, by J.E. Somma, finds Peter in modern times feeling neglected by the world. *Return to Neverland*, a Disney release, takes place during World War II. In this sequel it is Jane, Wendy's daughter, who is involved with Peter Pan.

It is important to distinguish between authorized and unauthorized versions of the Peter Pan story. In 1929, eight years before his death, James M. Barrie gave the Great Ormond Street Hospital in London all UK rights to *Peter Pan*. The hospital has ownership of anything that is published, produced, performed, or sold that bears reference to Peter Pan and the characters featured in Barrie's play and novels. Copyright laws have evolved over the years, and currently the hospital will lose the European rights in 2007, the U.S. rights extend until 2023.

To preempt the numerous sequels that are likely to emerge once the copyright expires, the Great Ormond Street Hospital instigated a worldwide competition to select an author to write an authorized sequel. Out of over 200 entries from published authors, children's book writer Geraldine McCaughrean's two sample chapters and synopsis won her the honor. Simon & Schuster's October 2006 publication of *Peter Pan in Scarlet* was much anticipated by the fans of James M. Barrie's story.

McCaughrean has written more than 130 books and plays for both adults and children, and has won three Whitbread Children's Book Awards, as well as the Carnegie Medal, the *Guardian* Fiction Prize, and the Smarties Bronze Award. To learn more about her, go to *www.geraldinemccaughrean.co.uk*.

McCaughrean faced some challenges before she began writing *Peter Pan in Scarlet*. "The Darling children and the Lost Boys came back to London at the end of *Peter Pan and Wendy*. Only Peter stayed in Neverland. So they went on growing up, whereas Peter did not. Twenty years have passed. So they have

NOIR FANTASTIC

Fredric Brown was a prolific author who was drawn to popular genres such as mystery stories and science fiction and he succeeded very well not only at at writing multitudes of successful short stories and novels in those genres (his first mystery novel, *The Screaming Mimi*, won him no less than an Edgar) but in eventually adapting them into scripts for movies and for television series hosted by people as supremely spooky as Alfred Hitchcock and Boris Karloff, who were clearly very happy with them.

Another thing Brown did with those genre stories and novels was to write them a good deal better than many others who were working in those fields and to open up and explore a wide number of possibilities in those fields' basic plot devices and narrative traditions—which had never occurred to anyone else writing sf and mystery fiction—and to play strange and highly entertaining games with their fundamental premises, causing many readers of those genres to widen their eyes and drop their jaws as they most certainly did to yours truly when I was a young and innocent lad.

Here Comes a Candle (Millipede Press, Lakewood, CT; 297 pp., trade paperback, $14.00) is a very boldly and oddly structured kind of collection as—besides its excellent and highly informative introduction by Bill Pronzoni—it consists of a good-sized, highly experimental novel, a very abrupt and extremely grotesque short story, and an almost painfully personal and heartfelt essay on the author's passionate atheism.

All three of these things are disturbing, thought-provoking, and strongly subversive to any number of highly respected conventions and they effectively add up to be a extremely skillful introduction to the mind and works of Fredric Brown which I imagine will have the laudable result of starting a lot of its readers eagerly tracking down other works of this odd and deeply talented author.

The short story is an important part of this introduction as it stresses one of Brown's dominant attributes which is to skillfully and slyly introduce marvelously scary humor into just about everything he wrote. It is called, very appropriately, "The Joke" and it concerns the horrendous doings of a highly noxious traveling salesman (by the way the tale is, in every respect, a classic traveling salesman story which I think is pretty funny) and the havoc he wreaks on a typical small American town of its period which is 1948 and which Brown captures perfectly and lovingly.

The salesman stalks through this little story and the naive settlement it depicts and, before you know it, the tale climaxes with a series of brutal surprise punch lines which I guarantee will traumatize you permanently and ensure that the story never entirely goes away and leaves you alone. It's really quite a little masterpiece.

The essay on the author's atheism also ends with a kind of punch line but a very different kind as, for all its somber speculations, bitter skepticism and pain-filled broodings. This is at rock bottom a passionate declaration of human worth which offers up the notion that if humanity will only allow itself to be human it just might save its silly self in spite of itself. Also, despite its strong aversion to revealed religion it has nothing but the highest respect for its more fervent practitioners. Very bracing and I think there is an excellent chance you'll find it helpful whatever your belief system.

I've read a good many of Brown's novels but I've mostly been drawn to his more overtly fantastic works and only now and then dipped into his noir material. The result is this has been my first exposure to *Here Comes a Candle* and I'm very grateful to the people Millipede Press for having led me to it.

Candle is essentially a tough gangster novel set in Milwaukee in the 1950s which concerns the search of a young man from Chicago named Joe Bailey who, having lived a wretched life of poverty and degradation so far, is very seriously determined to find success and has become increasingly indifferent to what means he has to take in order to get his hands around its neck.

He ties in with a numbers boss who sees enough promise in the lad to put him under the tutelage of a hardened and expert thug who expertly instructs him in the use of firearms and general brutality. But just as the reader settles down for a comfortable evening's read with a black and white Jimmy Cagney-style novel, weird images of sinister, candlelight shadows of someone or thing creeping closer come into view and the reader finds him or herself abruptly dropped from the comfy, standard novel narrative into a radio show complete with dialogue and sound effects about someone talking to their psychiatrist, only to be flung with the casual skill of a Judo master back into the novel only to find, just when he or she is getting once again comfortable with that novel, that he or she has somehow been suddenly tossed into a movie script.

Right around then you will realize you've gotten into something very, very strange along the lines of reading but I strongly recommend you grab the covers of the book just a little more firmly and continue on because, when you're done, I suspect you will want to read more of Fredric Brown's writing.

And that would be a very good thing! ❧

TALES OF THE ABYSS™

A TALE OF HONOR AND SACRIFICE, DUTY AND CHOICE
WHAT IS WRITTEN AND WHAT WILL BE.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

NEW YOUNG ADULT FANTASY BOOKS

BY MICHAEL JONES

Changeling, by Delia Sherman, Viking, 2006. In the space between the real world and the world of Fairy, there exists New York—a magical place of beauty and horror, where places have spirits and bizarre creatures of all kinds go about their daily routines. Neef is the Changeling of Central Park, kidnapped from the mortal world, and this is the only life she remembers. When she breaks the laws of Fairy, she's exiled from Central Park until she can accomplish three impossible tasks. She'll need every trick in her book, and the assistance of a very strange girl from the real New York to survive. Sherman thoroughly delivers an exciting, vibrant story set in a fascinating world, one I'd love to see more of.

Troll Bridge, by Jane Yolen and Adam Stemple, Starscape, 2006. What do the three members of a popular boy band, twelve teenage "Dairy Princesses," a family of hungry trolls, a cunning fox, and a magic fiddle have in common? They're all elements in *Troll Bridge*, the second in Yolen and Stemple's "Rock 'N' Roll Fairy Tale" series, which draws upon several different fairy tales to create something new and magical. In this fast-paced tale, it falls upon two unlikely heroes—one a harpist, the other a rock musician—to outwit their ancient captors and unweave the manipulations of a dubious ally in order to save the day. As an added bonus, this book contains original lyrics by musician Adam Stemple (formerly of popular groups Cats Laughing and Boiled in Lead). Overall, an intriguing read but over far too quickly.

Fairest, by Gail Carson Levine, HarperCollins, 2006. In a land where song and beauty are prized above all else, Aza is spurned for her relative ugliness, even though her voice is just short of magical. However, her vocal talents bring her into high society as a pawn of the new queen, a woman whose exquisite beauty hides a lackluster voice. Now Aza is caught in the middle of a deadly game that does not bode well for her country. Even as she falls for the prince, her role in the queen's machinations may cost Aza her freedom, or her life. And what role does a certain enchanted mirror play? Once again, Levine delivers a brilliantly skewed take on an old fairy tale, this time reimagining Snow White, set in the same world as *Ella Enchanted*.

No Place For Magic, by E.D. Baker, Bloomsbury, 2006. Though princess/sorceress Emma has fought monsters, outwitted witches, and even flown with dragons, she's about to face her greatest challenge yet: winning the approval of her future in-laws. Emma and her fiancé Eadric return to his home country so his parents can bless their intended marriage. Unfortunately, theirs is a land which distrusts magic. Can Emma stay on her best behavior, or will her tendency to use magic for the greater good land her in hot water?

Once trolls kidnap Eadric's younger brother, however, all bets are off. Will Emma and Eadric live happily ever after? The latest in the Tales of the Frog Princess series once again follows a feisty, independent heroine as she forges her own destiny.

River Secrets, by Shannon Hale, Bloomsbury, 2006. In this sequel to *Enna Burning*, the spotlight shines upon Razo, a clever young soldier selected to be part of an elite diplomatic mission sent into the dangerous land of Tira. There, Razo will discover his true skills as a spy and diplomat, and hero, delving deep into the heart of a conspiracy that could destroy all hope of peace for the two countries. Along the way, he'll also deal with his growing feelings for a girl who might be an enemy, or an ally. Though this series started as a reimagining of a fairy tale, it's grown into an intriguing, complex, highly enjoyable world in its own right, full of magic, emotion, and adventure.

Peter and the Shadow Thieves, by Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson, Hyperion, 2006. When Peter learns that his friend Molly may be in danger from evil people seeking control of the fabled starstuff (a mysterious dust that grants amazing powers to the user), he leaves the relative safety of Mollusk Island and returns to the urban jungle of London. There, he and his tiny sidekick Tink risk everything to protect Molly and her father, while keeping the starstuff from the shadowy Lord Ombra. Barry and Pearson have once again conjured up a roller-coaster tale set in the early days of the boy who will become Pan, a thrilling adventure full of magic and mystery.

The Last Days, by Scott Westerfeld, Razorbill, 2006. In this sequel to *Peeps*, the end of the world is at hand, with a plague turning people into cannibalistic vampires, even as ancient, evil creatures stir far beneath the Earth's surface. In New York, five teens start a rock group, unaware that their unique blend of talents may hold the key to humanity's ultimate survival. Once again, Westerfeld delivers an edgy tale of dark fantasy and urban horror, told in a variety of voices. The only drawbacks to this story are its relative lack of connection to its prequel, and an overly rushed resolution. Westerfeld could easily have drawn the story out further.

Catalyst, by Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Tachyon Publications, 2006. Kaslin unexpectedly initiates first contact with a strange alien race dwelling below the surface of the planet Chudoku, when he's forced to flee from a teenaged bully. However, both he and his nemesis, Hlisty, will have to make a fragile peace when the aliens change them, for better and for worse. A bizarre tale of alien intelligence, human emotion, and adolescent evolution as only Nina Kiriki Hoffman can deliver.

to find a way of recovering their childhood before they can go back to Neverland, because, of course, only children can go there. Worse still, the arch villain Hook was last seen disappearing into the gullet of a crocodile, and I don't do ghosts. I've never done ghosts. I don't approve of ghosts. And how long do fairies live? I don't know, do you? I have always thought of them as ephemera, like mayflies. But once I got over those first stumbling blocks, I was as happy as a pig in mud."

Peter Pan in Scarlet captures the style and adventure-filled plot of Barrie's original book. McCaughrean says, "I tried to pick up something of Barrie's quirky style, with its sprinkling of jokes and relish for language. Turning new eyes on a book I had known all my life, I trawled it for ideas, lines of thinking, little details, exciting incidents, and the characters of the Darlings, the Lost Boys, and Peter himself. My aim? A companion piece to the original, its twin brother."

The success of *Peter Pan in Scarlet*, of course, rests with the thousands of adults and children who will read the sequel. These readers are in for exciting new adventures, brand-new characters, and a male fairy with a cranky temperament to take Tinker Bell's place. Adults will enjoy the many jokes and observations that will float over their children's heads. The book is filled with surprises to delight fans of all ages. McCaughrean says, "My chief hope is that parents will read it to their children, just as *Peter Pan* was read in Edwardian nurseries. And I'll be very disappointed if the adults don't go on reading long after their children have nodded off to sleep."

Laura Cleveland

The Tourmaline, Paul Park, Tor, New York, hardcover, 352 pp., $24.95, ISBN 0-765-31441-X

In my review of *A Princess of Roumania*, I compared Paul Park's achievement to that of Philip Pullman in *His Dark Materials*, opining that "if Park's invention and nerve do not flag, the Roumania series may surpass Pullman's epic in artistry and accomplishment." On the evidence of the second volume, *The Tourmaline*, Pullman can consider himself surpassed. As good as *Princess* was, *Tourmaline* is even better. In this ambitious, original, and unflinchingly honest fantasy, Park is reinventing the too-familiar trope of young people conjured from our world to another, magical one, where they become, or rather always have been, key players in a fateful struggle.

The novels are not easy going. Park's vision is a dark one, if not without rays of hope. His main characters are no paragons of virtue or bravery but rather confused and resentful young people trying to do the right thing in a situation as bizarre as anything confronted by Alice through the looking glass and as dangerous as anything faced by Frodo on the way to Mt. Doom. His villains—especially the Baroness Nicola Ceausescu, a monster of self-pitying egotism—are full-blooded, complex characters with a remarkable ability to compete with the good guys for the sympathy of readers. There are disconcerting shifts of time and space, and an underlying metaphysical structure that calls into question more effectively than seems possible the reality of the world we readers inhabit. Only a writer of prodigious talent and exquisite control could hold such an edifice together. Park not only holds it together, he continually expands it in surprising and even shocking ways, demonstrating in the process a thoroughgoing familiarity with his historical and literary predecessors (the title of the first volume, for example, alludes to Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars*).

Princess ended with Miranda Popescu, the rightful heir to the Roumanian throne (and who, like the Shakespearean heroine of the same name, has discovered that her brave new world may not be either), separated from her friends and protectors, Peter and Andromeda. Because of a botched spell by the Elector of Ratsbon, a conniving sorcerer obsessed with expanding German power into Roumania and eliminating Miranda as a potential rallying point for local resistance, Miranda finds herself transported six thousand miles across the ocean and displaced some "five years and a few months" into the future, where the fifteen year-old girl suddenly finds herself a young woman of twenty.

Tourmaline recounts the efforts of Peter and Andromeda to find her. In the process, these two wonderful characters also undergo startling changes, slowly returning to their rightful forms, that of, respectively, Peter de Graz, a dull witted but brave and loyal soldier of immense strength, who is also a famous wrestler, and Sasha Prochenko, an androgynous figure who also happens to be a canal shapeshifter. Park's subtle, deeply insightful portrayal of the psychological effects of the physical and metaphysical changes wrought on and within these three characters as they search for each other and begin to find themselves is exhilarating and heartbreaking.

Meanwhile, the Elector of Ratsbon is up to more of his old tricks, while Baroness Ceausescu, possessing a magical talisman known as the Tourmaline, a jewel extracted from the brain of Johannes Kepler, has installed herself, with its help and the more mundane assistance of German invaders, on the Roumanian throne, from which she seeks to eradicate her rival, Miranda, whom she sees, not unreasonably, as a threat to her station and her very life.

With at least two more volumes still to come in Paul Park's saga, there are going to be a lot of impatient readers out there, including this one.

The Ladies of Grace Adieu and Other Stories, Susanna Clarke, Bloomsbury, New York, hardcover, 256 pp., $23.95, ISBN 1-59691-251-0

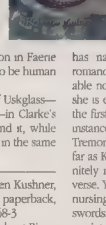
This handsome volume of short stories, tastefully illustrated by Charles Vess, is just the thing for devoted readers of Susanna Clark's brilliant first novel, the bestselling *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, who have been yearning to return to her alternate-Regency world of beautiful and malevolent fairies and the two magicians who, following in the footsteps of the great and mysterious Raven King, are attempting to bring magic back to England—a tamed and respectable magic, suitable to an age of reason and efficiency. The eight stories collected here, all but one previously published, are set in that world and feature many returning characters, including Jonathan Strange, the Duke of Wellington, and the Raven King, aka John Uskglass. It's probably not the best introduction to Clarke's work, however, partly because the quality of the individual stories, many of which follow traditional fairy tale forms (sometimes too closely), does not always rise to the same level of excellence as the novel, but also because Clarke evidently needs room in which to weave, through the patient accretion of small details, the richly atmospheric spell that constitutes a goodly portion of her strength as a writer, and short stories do not provide it. Even the best of the stories here gain from a reader's ability to place them within the context of the larger work. Simply put, the novel is Clarke's natural milieu. But that said, *The Ladies of Grace Adieu* is both a valuable adjunct to *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* and a worthy entertainment in its own right.

The collection is prefaced by a metafictional introduction ostensibly penned by "Professor James Sutherland, Director of Sidhe Studies, University of Aberdeen." Referring to the aforementioned *Strange & Norrell* as a "somewhat obscure novel published a few years ago," Sutherland expresses his hope that these stories will afford readers valuable insights into the realm of Faerie, "its complexity, its contradictions, and its perilous fascinations." And indeed they do.

The title story, which features Jonathan Strange, concerns three women—a potent number in witchy lore!—who, notwithstanding the common prejudice against the use of magic by their sex, nonetheless find themselves compelled to it by the clear and present danger facing two innocent young girls, future heiresses of a fortune, for whose safety one of

the women is responsible. It's a delightfully grisly tale of female revenge and male comeuppance in which Strange himself, whose views on women, though somewhat in advance of his time, are nonetheless chauvinistic in the extreme, comes in for some well-deserved correction. Clarke is at the top of her form here.

Less successful is "On Lickerish Hill," a retelling of Rumpelstiltskin that never escapes its source. This story reads like a narrative experiment by the author, who abandons her usual lapidary prose style, a masterful incarnation of the 19th-century omniscient voice, for a wilder Elizabethan voice that I found less well suited to her material.



Throughout the stories, Clarke adds tidbits to our knowledge of the Faery realm, and in the final story, "John Uskglass and the Cumbrian Charcoal Burner," which appears here for the first time, she actually introduces Christianity, or rather the powers behind it, into the supernatural hierarchy of her world, showing that there is a power that trumps even the magic of the fairies. I found this elevation of religion over magic in a Christian cosmos regrettable, and not only in its conventionality. More happily, the story presents the clearest portrait yet of the Raven King, a man whose very nature has been so altered by long immersion in Faerie that he scarcely knows what it is to be human anymore.

I hope that we will see more of Uskglass—and of Strange and Norrell, too—in Clarke's next novel, which, as I understand it, while not precisely a sequel, will be set in the same world as the first.

The Privilege of the Sword, Ellen Kushner, Bantam Spectra, New York, trade paperback, 382 pp., $14.00, ISBN: 0-553-38268-3

Ellen Kushner has been writing about Riverside, a somewhat seedy district in a nameless city that resembles an amalgam of 17th- and 18th-century London and Paris, since 1987's *Swordspoint*, an excellent early exemplar of the so-called "fantasy of manners" subgenre that was also a graceful trailblazer in its portrayal of gay characters and relationships. Writing about a highly stratified society in which questions of honor amongst the nobility are settled at swordpoint by proxies hired for the purpose, homosexuality and bisexuality are common and accepted, and distinctions of class are of greater importance than sexual preference (though not gender, as *The Privilege of the Sword* eloquently makes clear), Kushner let her rapier-like writing, vivid characterizations, and cleverly plotted story speak for themselves. The result was an urbanely sophisticated romantic adventure that staked modest but important new ground for literary fantasy—ground that Kushner has continued to develop with artful intelligence in a number of shorter works, and in one novel, *The Fall of the Kings*, co-written with her partner, novelist Delia Sherman; however, Kushner's latest foray into the dangerous streets and perhaps even more dangerous bedchambers of Riverside, set about twenty years after *Swordspoint* and featuring many of the characters introduced there, is, like her first, a solo expedition. I don't have anything against collaborations, especially between talented writers, but the creator of a fictional world brings something unique to its elaboration that even a trusted partner cannot supply, and for that reason I am glad to see Kushner back in the driver's seat.

The Privilege of the Sword begins as a coming-of-age story in which Lady Katherine Samantha Campion Talbert, niece of Alec Campion, aka The Mad Duke, is summoned by her notorious uncle to the city for a period of one year, during which time she will be trained in the art of swordsman—er, womanship. In exchange, the duke will drop a long standing lawsuit that threatens to reduce Katherine's family to penury, or as near enough as would make no difference to aristocratic sensibilities. Once ensconced in her new household, which the quick-witted Katherine has naïvely imagined as a gateway into romance and perhaps even marriage to a suitable nobleman, she is indignant to learn that she is expected to dress as a boy at all times; the first but by no means the last or the least instance of gender-bending in the book. Duke Tremontaine may or may not be mad, but as far as Katherine is concerned, he is most definitely maddening, arbitrary, capricious, perverse. Yet oh so smart and oh so beautiful, and nursing a secret sorrow related to master swordsman Richard St. Vier, his lover in *Sword spoint*, now mysteriously absent from the scene, presumed fled if not dead.

The lonely Katherine befriends her uncle's assistant, Marcus, a boy her own age who may or may not be one of her uncle's many lovers, and rather desperately pursues friendship with the flighty heiress Lady Artemesia Fitz-Levy, who is making her debut in the society from which Katherine is excluded as much by her company as by her clothes. Betrothed in short order to the Mad Duke's mortal enemy, Lord Ferris, Lady Artemesia soon finds her dream engagement to be a nightmare, and her own parents are too besotted with Ferris's wealth and power to heed her pleas that the engagement be broken off. Katherine, whose romantic notions remain firmly in place despite her own disappointments, and who now possesses some skill with the sword, a troublesome combination, decides to avenge her friend ... and unwittingly stumbles into the power struggle between Ferris and her uncle.

The "privilege" of the novel's title refers not only to the exclusive right of the nobility to employ swordsmen as assassins and enforcers, but also to the unspoken assumption that only men can wield swords for pay and in defense of honor. Katherine herself is initially of this opinion, and only gradually, as she becomes more adept with the sword, does she find her views on the matter, and on the position of women in society generally, undergoing pronounced change.

Kushner details the widening of Katherine's social, political, and sexual horizons with a touch both delicate and deadly. While I found the ending of the novel perfunctory, even anticlimactic, there is much to savor in all that precedes it. The attentive reader will find just about every virtue a good fantasy novel can possess in these pages, save one—there is no magic. And in Kushner's able hands, that absence is itself a virtue.

Ex Cathedra, Rebecca Maines, Twilight Tales, trade paperback, 167 pp., $12.00, ISBN: 0-9779856-0-1

Faith, especially religious faith, is a topic too infrequently explored with passion and intelligence, let alone humor, in science fiction, and it fares even worse in fantasy, where too many writers are content to offer up meaningless platitudes about Good and Evil, forgetting that, as Oscar Wilde wrote, "Skepticism is the beginning of faith." This fine debut collection of speculative fiction by Rebecca Maines keeps that element very much in mind. Maines, a gifted writer with a wide range, locates her subject everywhere from the Bible to the baseball field, and she often approaches it from a feminist angle that sheds a provocative new light on old stories and tropes. In "Sarah, Who Speaks to the Lord," for example, Maines retells the familiar story of Abraham's sacrifice from the point of view of his wife, Sarah, and in the process completely revises the import of the tale, while keeping its spiritual core intact—no easy feat. In "The Canterbury Path," one of a thread of stories dealing with a space-faring future in which aliens have adopted Christianity, she explores a priest's crisis of faith with a sensitivity that reminded me of Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow*. Perhaps the strongest testament in the collection to the inscrutable vagaries of faith, however, comes in an amusing science fiction story called "The Next Ted Williams," which relies for its punch on the Curse of the Bambino still being operative in the future, when human cloning is possible. Little did Maines dream, when she wrote the story in 2002 that the Red Sox would win the Series just two years later, for the first time in eighty-six years. Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief! ❧

Paul Witcover

THREE WISHES

Humans can be a puzzling lot.
They often say most when they say nothing.

Hazaul could not see out of the bottle in which he had been sealed, but he could sometimes feel the bottle moving on the waves or scraping along the sandy shore. At other times, when the bottle was buried in the dunes, he could feel the movements of the earth around the sun and the moon around the earth. He spent long centuries in his tiny prison.

Then one day, he felt the bottle moving in an unnatural way. He felt the soul of a mortal man nearby. Then, like the crackle of thunder, he heard the wax seal breaking. Hazaul leapt out of his prison and beheld the person who had released him: a young man wearing a simple *thaub*, his head covered with a white *ghutra*. The young man held out his hands to shade his eyes from the brilliance of Hazaul's skin.

Hazaul stretched to his full height and said with a voice like raging winds, "I am the djinn Hazaul! An enchanter trapped me in the bottle, but you have freed me. Speak your heart's desire, mortal, and I will grant it. Name three wishes, and all will be as you command!"

"I ... I do not know," said the young man. He squinted and tried to look at Hazaul's face, but he could not bear the brightness.

Hazaul reminded himself of the sorts of things men asked for. "Will you have riches and eat the tongues of parrots from a silver plate?" he suggested. "Will you live a thousand years? Will you sire children on one hundred women, each more beautiful than the last?"

The young man said again, "I do not know. I do not know what to ask for."

"Then behold," said the djinn. With his great finger, he touched the mortal's mouth, then his own ear. "Now when you speak the name of Hazaul, I will answer. Call to me, and across the worlds I will come. Three times may you summon me, and three times will I answer. Now, what is my name?"

"Hazaul," answered the man.

Then at last did Hazaul take his leave from the world where an enchanted bottle had been his prison. He went home to the realms of the djinn. He occupied himself with the affairs of djinn. He rarely thought of the man who had freed him. Now and then, however, he would feel life vibrations in the thread that he had spun between them, and he would wonder. Why had the man not yet summoned him? The time of mortals moves swiftly, and a human life is soon over.

The thread grew thin, as thin as a hair, then thinner. At last it was less than a spider's web. It vibrated weakly, as with the beating of a tired heart. Though he had not been summoned, the djinn followed the thread back to the world of mortals. There he found his liberator, an old man now, sickly, and in his bed. An old woman also slept in that room, and in the other room were sleepers who must have been the man's children and grandchildren, come to see the man in his last days. Hazaul cast a spell of deeper sleep, then revealed himself only to the man.

"Why have you not summoned me?" said the djinn. "Did you forget my name?"

"Ah, Hazaul," said the man, raising his hands against the brightness of the djinn. "How it has comforted me to know that I might wish for things."

"But you have never made a wish!"

"No. When my wife and I fought, I nearly wished that she and I had never met. Then I thought of my children. When my father died, I nearly wished that he might live forever. But then I thought of others who were grieving, and asked myself why my wish should not relieve their pain as well. For that matter, why not relieve all suffering? But then I thought of a world in which no one died: a world with no room for new life. I considered that the end of suffering might also mean the end of compassion, and what a loss that would be for our souls even if we never died."

"And now?" said the djinn. "You are dying. Will you let the wishes go unfulfilled?"

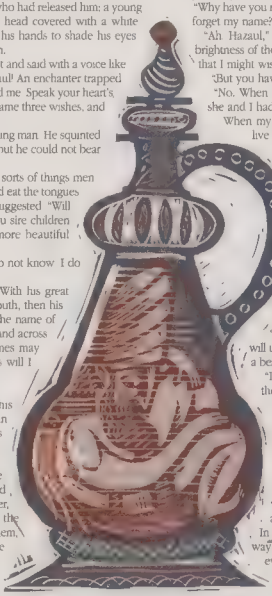
"Ah, that would be a shame," said the man. "I will use them." He thought for a moment. "Blue is a beautiful color. I wish that the sky were blue."

"Let it be as you command," said the djinn, though it was already so.

"As for me," the man said, "let me die in peace as an old man with a full heart."

"Let it be as you command," said the djinn, though the wish required no exercise of his power.

"And the third," the man said, "I think I will leave the third unspoken. But I wish it. I do wish it." He closed his eyes, then, and fell asleep. He would not awaken again. In his sleep, he smiled. The djinn went on his way then, back to the affairs of his own kind. But every so often, he found himself thinking of human beings. So very many of them were fools. ❧



By Bruce Holland Rogers * Illustration by William L. Brown

Lo
If you go looking
THEY'RE

The funeral was closed casket. With a body that mangled, the mortician couldn't do much to make it presentable. Douglas Bennett was forty-eight years old when he died.

His son shot dead the man who killed him. Not that anyone believed a man could do what had been done to Douglas. The police assumed it was an animal—a bear, or maybe even a wolf—so when they found the second body with a bullet wound through the head and sixteen-year-old Cormac Bennett holding the rifle, they thought they had a delinquent on their hands. Maybe the kid just snapped out of grief and rage at losing his father.

Then the coroner found Douglas Bennett's blood and skin under the victim's fingernails and human flesh between his teeth. The kid pleaded self-defense through his court-appointed attorney. The D.A. dropped the charges.

Douglas Bennett's sister, Ellen O'Farrell, took the boy in. Ellen, her husband David, and their son Ben walked on eggshells around him. The boy had killed a man, whatever the circumstances might have been, and at his age he could go either way: recover and move on, or spiral down into psychosis. They didn't talk about Douglas and what had happened; they tried to pretend everything was normal. They kept Cormac busy.

oking

for monsters, it's easy to find them. THE ONES WHO AREN'T YOU.

BY CARRIE VAUGHN

Ben didn't want to keep quiet He was crazy to ask his cousin what it had been like, how it had felt, did he want to do it again and what had *really* happened? He watched Cormac out of the corner of his eye, hiding behind a light brown flop of bangs Cormac hadn't said two sentences together in the month he'd been there

Ben was doing homework at the chrome and formica kitchen table after supper His mother was washing dishes in the kitchen Cormac helped her, drying plates and stacking them on the counter for her to put away He was tall, lanky He slouched and had a lazy way of moving His limbs seemed to hang loosely

David came in from the mudroom attached to the kitchen, wearing his heavy work coat and putting on his cowboy hat. "Cormac? You want to help me put out hay for the cattle?"

Cormac set the towel on the counter "Yes, sir"

Ben stood, jostling the table "I'll help too."

No, Ben, you stay and do your homework," his father said

But

It's cold, and I don't want you out in it

He disappeared through the door. Cormac followed, pausing a moment to look back at Ben, who sat and ducked his gaze, not wanting to get caught staring. He was blushing His father didn't have to tell him off like a little kid in front of Cormac But Ben supposed he'd asked for it He'd known what his father would say

The numbers on his algebra worksheet seemed to fade and jumble together

A moment later his mother stood beside him, drying her hands

He's right, Ben. It's too cold out. You know he really wants you to stay in and study hard."

Yeah. I know." He didn't care about the cold. He wasn't sick anymore

You're going to be the first one in the family to go to college It means the world to him And me, too." She squeezed his shoulder and went back to the counter to put dishes away

He knew, but college was such a long way off, and it wouldn't get him the respect of someone like Cormac

Ben told his mother he was reading for school, but he turned the light out, sat up by the window in his bedroom, and stared over the nighttime ranch. The moon was almost full and made the patches of snow scattered across the prairie glow silver The posts and rails of the corral fences were shadows, streaks of dark in the moonlight

The pickup, its bed empty of hay now, drove around the corner and parked by the barn on the other side of the corrals His father and Cormac jumped out of the cab and came toward the house They looked good together Right. The burly rancher and the tall kid walking beside him. They weren't even related by blood and they looked more like father and son than David and Ben did Ben was thin, not strong enough for ranch work Not that he'd had a chance to prove himself, or grow into the work. Better suited for books, they'd all decided

He turned on the light, sat on his bed leaning against a pillow, held his book, and tried to look like he'd been that way for the last couple hours When Cormac came to live with them, they'd squeezed a spare bed into the room Ben had lost his only private place on the ranch

Cormac opened the door

Ben glanced up, he hoped casually. "Hey."

Hey." Cormac said

Ben couldn't think of anything to say after that. *So, how are the cows? What's it like being an orphan?* He just watched his cousin over the edge of his book. Cormac pulled off a sweatshirt, untucked the flannel shirt underneath, slung them over the back of a chair. Peeled out of his white t-shirt, dropped it, turned back the covers of his bed, unzipped and shoved down his jeans. Crawled into bed wearing only his briefs. Rolled over with his back facing Ben, who'd lost his chance to say anything.

He couldn't remember what they'd talked about when they were kids Movies and TV, probably They'd seen each other every spring—Cormac's family had always come to help with branding the calves—and at Thanksgiving They were close enough to the same age that they hung out with each other then. Ben could remember playing king of the hill, riding ponies. and taking family trips to Grand Lake. But those times were a while ago and the person sleeping in the next bed seemed like someone different

He put down his book and turned out the light Moonlight bled into the room around the edges of the curtain

Cormac went through the motions. Wake up, wash and dress, function for the day. Sleep at night. The rest was numb. If he didn't think, he didn't have to react

His aunt and her family were good to take him in, house him and feed him and all He paid them back by doing chores It was how he'd been taught You got more out of life being polite than not. He couldn't forget what he'd been taught. Especially now.

Full moon night, he went hunting, like he'd been taught Full moon was when they came out, and there was no one left to do it but Cormac

The cops told him he shouldn't handle guns anymore, even though he'd been hunting for years, helping with Dad's outfitting business Too many questions about him and guns. They wanted him to keep his nose clean, they said

Cormac didn't care

Uncle David, a little more practical and a lot more knowledgeable about how they led their lives, had let him keep his rifle For keeping coyotes off the property, he said Didn't matter, as long as Cormac had access to it He had the bullets, too. His Dad's bullets The cops hadn't known about those

Aunt Ellen and Uncle David hadn't asked him about the man he shot. They must have known They must have known what it was he'd shot, even if none of them could tell the cops about it. They'd understand about him going out now

He wrapped up a slice of beef from the fridge and carried it with him in a paper bag

With all the sense of righteousness in the world, he quietly made his way to the mudroom and loaded the silver bullets into his rifle

"Hey."

Cormac looked up, too distracted to be startled by Ben's appearance. He stood there, dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, a stripe of moonlight from the window slicing across him

"What're you doing?" Ben asked

"Nothing," Cormac said automatically He snapped the chamber closed

"Can I go with you?"

Ben stood with his hands clenched, almost trembling. He wanted outside so badly Folks kept him on a chain, and Cormac wondered why Ranch kid oughta be tough as nails He'd slow Cormac down if he came along. Couldn't be sure he knew anything

He might go tell Aunt Ellen and Uncle David what he was doing if Cormac left him behind

After a moment, he said, "Sure

Let him come along If he couldn't hack the trip, he could always

turn around and go back home Wasn't Cormac's business, as long as he didn't get in the way.

The air was the crystalline freezing that only a clear winter night could produce. Cormac breathed it in and let its sharpness urge him on Only way to keep warm on a night like this was to keep moving

Also, he half wanted to see how quickly Ben dropped back and complained about not being able to keep up. He didn't His thin frame gave him a long stride to match Cormac's

"Your folks are going to kill you for coming outside," Cormac said

"I don't care. They don't know anything. Haven't had an asthma attack in three years."

They'd walked out of sight of the farmhouse when Ben said, "What're we hunting?"

Cormac looked at him, wondering again how much he knew. Decided he didn't care If Ben didn't know what was out there, he would by morning. "What killed my Dad Full moon's when they come out."

Ben turned the collar of his coat up around his jaw and walked beside Cormac, determined to keep up with the taller boy's easy stride. Their boots crunched on dry prairie grass and occasional crusts of snow. The air was searing cold, and their breaths came out as fog

God, why did he feel like such a little kid around Cormac?

Eventually, they reached the foothills and the first of the pine trees that became the forest that covered the mountains The full moon was high, the air crisp and silent They moved quickly enough that Ben didn't get cold.

He wondered if he should have brought a gun, too

A song broke the night, a high-pitched note that held long, then sank into nothing

Cormac stopped Ben with a hand on his arm. "Hear that?"

The sound had made his gut turn and his hair stand up The thing that made it might have been far away, or watching them from the stand of trees a hundred yards off Lots of animals lived out here, friendly He was the invader here, waiting for the attack that would have to come

The wolf howl sounded again and was cut short. The tone of it echoed

Ben wanted to suggest that maybe they go back to the house But he wanted to see what Cormac was going to do

There wasn't a wind for them to walk down of On such a clear, still night, their scent would just float, and every sound they made thundered

Cormac went to a stunted tree that had ventured onto the plain It stood about four feet high and had only a few gnarled branches with spiky tufts of pine needles. He opened the paper bag he'd brought and pulled out something wrapped in butcher paper. From the wrapper, he removed a sizable piece of beef, raw and dripping He must have taken it from the fridge Mom was going to be livid

He stabbed the meat through the end of a branch. He crumpled up the paper and stuffed it back in the bag. "Come on," he said, and nodded to a stand of trees fifty yards off Ben followed, looking over his shoulder at the meat, wondering what would come to the bait

They hunkered down in the shadow of the trees and waited Now, Ben started to get cold. It seeped into his hands and feet first, then numbed his ears and nose Cormac sat as still as a rock, not complaining, so Ben didn't dare thump his feet and clap his hands to warm them. He felt a cough tickling his lungs and swallowed it He didn't need to cough. He wasn't going to catch pneumonia

He couldn't stop his teeth from chattering. He tightened his jaw and wondered how Cormac could stand it But then, Cormac had a reason for being here and the will to stay. Some family gossip said an animal had killed Cormac's father. But Cormac had shot dead the man who murdered him So which was it?

"How long we going to wait?" Ben finally asked in a tense whisper.

"All night Don't worry, it's not that cold. You won't freeze."

"I'm not worried," Ben said "Just bored."

"Be quiet."

"You're crazy, you know that?"

"Shh!" He never took his gaze off the tree with the meat

Ben tried to see inside his cousin's thoughts "Is all this 'cause of

Dad never taught him what to DO IN A MESS LIKE THIS. MONSTER was a monster, he'd always said.

between prairie and mountain Deer, elk, fox. Didn't see most of them most of the time. They knew how to hide, but they had ways of letting you know they were there

"Coyotes?"

Cormac gave him a brief, pained look. "Wolves."

He knew Cormac was right but he argued anyway. It made sense to argue. "There aren't any wolves around here."

"No, there aren't." He looked around, eyes narrowed, studying the world Ben looked too, he didn't know what he was looking for, except the shapes of his own fears. The shadows were so black and stark He could see far, but the landscape wasn't familiar or your Dad? I thought you already got what killed him Don't see much point in this unless you just like shooting things."

What Ben really wanted was for Cormac to break. To get angry, shout, scream, cry, anything. His face never changed. His cold gaze kept staring out

Then Cormac licked his lips. "My Dad taught me how to do this We went out every full moon. It's what he did. He taught me, and now I have to do it myself."

He put his gloved hand in his pocket, took it out fisted around something He held his hand open to Ben A bullet lay in Cormac's palm Ben picked it up, held it to the moonlight rolled it between

his fingers. It shone, luminous and otherworldly. Silver.

Cormac was either crazy or he was right. Ben would know which by morning.

The part of hunting that most people couldn't stand was the waiting. Dad's business had been taking people into the back country, equipping them, guiding them, holding their hands so they could bag an elk or eight point buck and take the trophies and stories back to their corporate boardrooms. High-end outfitting. They didn't have to like their clients—Cormac didn't, most of the time. Self centered, heads up their butts. Treated Cormac and his Dad like they were back woods hicks. And they didn't understand waiting. Sometimes the best way to find your quarry was to sit still and wait for it. Know where they like to go, then park there and make yourself part of the landscape. The rich playboys wanted their kills *now*. They'd paid their money and couldn't understand why the animals didn't just walk up to them and bare their necks.

The attitude showed a severe lack of respect for the animals. They didn't understand—they couldn't, with only five days in the wilderness, with someone else pitching the tents and cooking their meals—that the smarter the animal, the harder the kill. The greater the challenge.

Dad taught him that these were the smartest animals out there. Hunting them was an art. Cormac could wait for it.

His cousin surprised him. Didn't fidget, didn't complain. Showing him the bullet had shut him up. At least he was smart. Seemed to be patient, too. Might make a good hunter.

Ben must have thought he was clever, trying to see through him, like that. His words couldn't touch Cormac, though. Wasn't anything he hadn't already thought of. He didn't have nightmares.

Then, there it was. A rustle of movement, something four-legged, gliding like fog. That hadn't taken long at all—the moon was still high.

It was a big one, two hundred pounds or so, three feet at the shoulder. Male. Dark gray, well camouflaged. Big and confident. But not for long.

He waited. He'd been patient this long, a few more moments wouldn't matter. Wait until it had the bait, until it was occupied.

He braced the rifle under his arm and sighted down the barrel. There: under the ear, middle of the skull. He had him.

Something exploded. A gunshot, not his. Splinters flew out. Someone had shot the tree they'd sheltered by. Ben skittered sideways and curled up on the ground with his arms over his head.

Cormac looked out, followed the path from where bits of the tree were blown out, up the hill.

A figure, dressed for winter hunting, moved toward them, holding his own rifle ready to fire a second shot, right at Cormac.

He wasn't scared. It occurred to him that Ben had the right idea, huddling on the ground for protection. But Cormac found himself staring at the mouth of that weapon and not caring. He'd seen worse. He'd stared down worse. This was nothing. He stood his ground.

The wolf looked up and watched them with interest.

"Put your gun down!" the stranger shouted. His expression twisted with anguish.

'Why, should I?" Cormac breathed, in and out, wondering if he was going to have to kill this guy to get to the wolf.

'I won't let you hurt him."

He kept moving closer, and Cormac knew he could shoot him. It was self-defense. His second shooting in as many months. The sheriff was going to love this. "That's close enough. Stop there."

He did. He looked a little like Cormac himself, young and desperate. Probably not much older. Mirror image. Not quite.

"What business is it of yours, if I shoot that thing on our property?

"I can't let you do that. He's mine. My pet."

Cormac wouldn't have blamed him if HE'D SHOT THEM ALL. THAT WOULD HAVE been the safest, most ruthless thing to do.

about what happened, because he'd already seen his fears with his waking eyes. He'd already killed them. Nothing else could get him now. Especially not Ben.

This—this was just what he was supposed to do. His mission handed down from father to son for four generations. Sacred trust. Dad had called it.

Cormac kept his gaze soft. Wouldn't do any good to focus on the bait; his vision would close down to that one spot and he wouldn't see anything approach. He relaxed and took in as much of the land around him as he could, all the hills and trees, all the shadows that something could hide in, watching for that flicker of movement. The moonlit world was bright, but a kind of filtered brightness. The colors were all drained to black, white, charcoal and deep blue.

Not likely, not in a million years. Not that big, not that intelligent. The wolf still watched them. A real wolf would have run away by now. But this one knew what was happening, and Cormac grew angry that the stranger with the rifle would lie so blatantly.

Do you know what it is?

Yes. Yes I do. He's my brother. I look after him.

Christ, did he think that changed anything? Didn't matter if he went around twenty-nine days out of the month on two legs, nicest guy in the world. Didn't matter at all, because that one day he was a killer. They gave men the chair for being killers. Cormac was just part of that process, in a roundabout way.

The wolf growled and started moving toward him. Cormac swung around to aim at it, ready to blow it away, this other guy be damned.

No, Michael," the stranger said. "Stay back. Don't make it worse please

The wolf stopped and wagged its tail. Brothers Cormac wouldn't have believed it

Dad never taught him what to do in a mess like this Monster was a monster, he'd always said. That was so perfectly clear when he'd been attacked last month When he'd been killed

And what if Dad had survived the attack? What if he'd turned into one of those things? What would Cormac have done, shot him?

"He hasn't hurt anyone," the stranger said. "Just let us go Lower your gun and we'll walk away. I'm telling you, he hasn't hurt anyone

How am I supposed to believe that?" Cormac's voice shook tight with tears that he hadn't cried, not once

It's true. He listens to me He's never hurt anyone

He saw his father, his face nipped to shreds, throat torn open so the vertebrae of his neck were visible, blood pouring from arteries

But he might Someday If you're not around to stop him." Do it He had the shot For his father

"You fire and I'll shoot you!

He thought that Cormac actually cared, that he actually still had some life in him. "I'll get my shot off same time you shoot me Your brother'll die too

"And I'll shoot your friend here right after"

Cormac looked at Ben who was sprawled at his feet Ben caught his gaze, begging him with his eyes Even now he didn't complain didn't shout or cry or anything. But he had those eyes, with fear locked down inside him

He locked it down tight His voice didn't waver when he said If you kill that wolf, he'll turn into a person, won't he? Like the guy that killed your Dad"

Cormac nodded, wondered what he was going to do Wondered if Ben's fear was right: that he would just as soon let his cousin die

"Cormac, you have to let them go He's just looking after his family Like you."

Cormac almost lost it then, because Ben was wrong. Cormac wasn't looking after anything He didn't care, didn't they see that? This was pure, meaningless revenge, because Ben was right, he'd already got the one that had killed his Dad. And if he'd been faster, been less afraid, more ruthless, he might have been able to save his father He should have been able to save him.

That would always be true, no matter how many monsters he killed. This wasn't about looking after family. Cormac should have done better, should have known better. Dad should still be alive He'd know what to do

Ben knew what to do

Cormac lowered his rifle

A heart stopping moment later, the stranger lowered his. Cormac wouldn't have blamed him if he'd shot them all That would have been the safest, most ruthless thing to do "Come on, Michael," he said and backed away

The wolf picked up the meat and trotted off His brother followed him to the trees

Ben got to his feet His breaths wheezed a little, and Cormac remembered he'd mentioned asthma Kid shouldn't have come along Cormac shouldn't have let him He should have helped him up off the ground. He thought about it too late

Maybe he'd remember next time

The wolf and the stranger disappeared into the trees, and Cormac's heart clenched He'd missed his shot His father would be disappointed

At first, Ben wondered how he was going to keep his cousin from shooting—push the rifle away, yell at him, chase off the wolf, anything. He'd start a fight with Cormac, he didn't doubt that and didn't doubt that he'd lose badly—and that would get Cormac in trouble all over again with his folks. Wolves were endangered, he knew that much about them. Shooting one would bring down a lot of trouble on Cormac, trouble he didn't need since his father died

Then the stranger showed up, and he was the only one who'd walk away from this, Ben was sure

Ben wondered at the story behind the pair how did the brother get this way, and how long had they been doing this How someone could be so devoted to a brother that he'd follow him into this

How Cormac could be so devoted to his father that he'd follow him into this

Ben had no doubt Cormac would let it happen He only cared about killing the wolf, even if it meant they all died for it. Ben wondered if he could make a run for it His lungs were already hurting The stranger had hit the tree from farther off. He'd shoot Ben easy No running away from that, even if his lungs could take it

Cormac looked at him His gaze was stony as ever, and Ben didn't know if he stared back at a cold killer or the cousin who shared his room They couldn't possibly be the same person Cormac had to pick one or the other

Pick me, Ben pleaded silently He didn't remember what he said—probably begging for his life like a snot-nosed kid

Then it was over The guns were lowered, and the stranger and the wolf his brother went away

Ben started to get up. Hours must have passed, and he didn't think he'd ever be able to stand again, he was so stiff with cold He managed it, his muscles creaking, his hands shaking

"I should have shot him," Cormac said, clenching his rifle

The pain of memories filled Cormac's eyes Now that he'd seen the kind of reaction he'd wanted, Ben wished he could make it stop Cormac was the strong one. He had to be, if he was going to survive all this

"Come on." Ben put his hand on Cormac's shoulder to turn him around "Let's go home."

They walked in silence until the house came into view. No lights were on They hadn't been discovered

Off-handed. Cormac said, "Know how to shoot?

Ben considered him Something was different He couldn't say how Cormac still had that cold, rigid stance that made everyone so careful around him But Ben didn't think times in the house would be so quiet and strained anymore

"Course I do Dad taught me." Couldn't live on a ranch with rifles and not know how to shoot Everybody knew that

"Maybe we could go hunting sometime

Ben looked sharply at him

He shrugged "You know, coyotes Or deer or something."

"Real hunting?"

"Yeah, sure I mean, *I* know you can go out in the cold, even if your folks don't."

Ben bit back a grin Couldn't let Cormac think he was excited or anything

The moon set behind the hills

Spare Change

BY CHUCK ROTHMAN ILLUSTRATION BY JANET HAMLIN

"Spare change?" Roger asked.

The man walked just a bit faster, not even making eye contact.

"Have a good evening, sir," Roger added. He coughed and pulled his worn trenchcoat tighter. October already. Soon it would be winter again, and he wasn't sure if he could survive the cold.

Florida. That would be such a relief, especially since they ordered the shelters not to take him in. But last year they wouldn't let him leave New York. There were breakdowns and delayed trains. Not even hitchhiking had worked, though the 30 days in jail had been a relief. They had been very thorough, but, then, they always were. They plotted against him, taking his job and just about everything else from him.

Three years ago, he'd been working for Chase. Now he was begging in the street in a coat you could practically see through, and hoping he wouldn't have to face another New York winter. His sinuses were already killing him where the chip had been implanted. They had done all this to him and he had no idea why.

Another man was approaching. Maybe today they'd let him get a few dollars. Roger could never be sure when someone said "no" if it was just bad luck, or if people were being told to avoid him. Or maybe a combination. The rules always seemed to be changing. Begging was the only thing they ever let him do. Probably because of the constant humiliation.

Spare change, mister?" he said.

The man smiled and tossed a couple of quarters his way. "Why certainly, Roger. And that's just the start."

Roger jolted at the sound of his name. It had been months since anyone used it. He tried to place the man. He was medium height and wore an Italian suit that probably cost more than Roger had managed to scrape together in three years of begging. Maybe they had met back when he still worked at the bank. But that was so long ago, before they had done this to him. "You know me?"

"Of course, Roger. We've been following you with a lot of interest."

Then Roger understood. "You're one of them, aren't you?"

The man nodded. "Smart man, Roger. We like that. You can call me Smith, if you like. How'd you like to be treated to lunch at the Bernadin?"

Roger laughed. He knew of the place, one of the fanciest in the city. "They won't even let me walk by the place. They're not going to let me inside looking like this."

Smith only smiled.

The maitre d' didn't give Roger a second glance as he seated the two men. No mention of even wearing a tie. No mention of the fact Roger hadn't had a shower in ages. Just a seat at the best table in the restaurant.

"Try the lamb," the man said as he picked up the menu.

Roger glanced at the items. "I don't see it."

His host just grinned. "You're with me. They'll serve it."

Roger set down the menu. "All right, what's this all about?"

"I think you get the general idea."

"You did all this to me, that I know. Who are you?"

"The official name is the Technological Hierarchy for the Education of Mankind, but we prefer call ourselves 'Them.' It cuts down on confusion."

"So you're one big conspiracy. Like the Kennedy assassination."

"Oh, please," Smith said. "We had nothing to do with *that*. Jack was one of us. No one gets to be president without us; I can tell you the results of the next three presidential elections, if you want. We've been running things since the '40s."

"Everything?"

Smith nodded. "Everything. That's why we were able to do all this to you."

"Tell my parents I was dead?"

"We even supplied the body for the funeral."

"And my friends?"

"You know the answer to that."

Roger did. When he tried to call, the phones wouldn't work. When he tried to drive, the car wouldn't start—when he had a car. When he walked to a friend's apartment, he'd been arrested. Once the entire apartment building where his ex-girlfriend lived was missing.

"Yeah," Roger said. "I guess I do. But why me? I can't see how I could have been any threat to you."

"Threat?" Smith started to laugh. "*Threat?*" The laughter was strong and loud now. It went on for several minutes before he managed to get control of himself. "Of course you're not a threat. We control *everything*, so there's nothing you can do to threaten us."

Roger faced the guffaws with a growing sense of irritation. "Then why?"

"We have nothing to challenge us. We need something to amuse ourselves, to stay sharp. That's why we invented the Game."

"The Game?"

"Think of it as a form of tag. You will choose the next person to suddenly lose everything. At that point, you're free."

"To do what? Starve?"

"Oh, I think you'll manage. You were one of the best, really. Nearly three years without cracking. Some of us will be happy to give you a hand getting your heart's desire."

"What do you mean?"

Smith took out a magazine. "Been to the movies much?"

"Other than using one as a place to flop? Of course not."

"Pity. You'll have a lot to catch up with." He opened the magazine and pointed to a picture.

It was an ad for a film. *Blinding Justice* was the name. Starring Kris Flynn. "So?"

"Take a closer look."

Roger did. The face was familiar, even if the name was not. Then it registered.

"My God. It's her!"

Smith nodded.

Roger had never known her name. She was just a panhandler hitting him up for spare change. He remembered wondering why she was on the street. Something about her made her seem out of place.

He took pity on her and gave her a fifty.

She had looked at the bill in disbelief. "I'm not a hooker," she finally said, reluctantly handing the bill back to him.

"I know. Keep it. It's a gift."

She rubbed it several times, as though expecting it to vanish. "Thank you," she said, tears in her eyes. "Oh, thank you. If ever there was an angel on Earth, you're it."

Roger had smiled.

But she had turned pale. "Oh, God," she said. "Oh, God. I didn't mean it. I didn't mean *him!*" Then she turned to Roger. "I'm sorry, so very sorry."

Roger had rushed away, thinking his assessment of her sanity was a little too rash.

A week later, they implanted the chip in his nose and it all began.

Roger looked up from the picture. "You did this to her? A beggar?"

"How do you think she ended up a beggar in the first place?" Smith placed his napkin on his lap. "She had played very well, so she got what she wanted most. What do you want most, Roger?"

What I want, thought Roger, *is to wipe that grin off your face.* "I don't know."

"Well, you can decide that later. You have a more important decision first. You need to choose our next subject."

"Me?"

"Exactly. You must choose someone, knowing full well that he will have his life destroyed. It's your responsibility."

"No, it isn't."

"Oh, you can always decide not to choose anyone. You can continue living like you have. I guarantee you won't be eating dinner at the Bernadin, that's for sure." Smith gave another one of his goddamn smiles. "And the one way to recover your life is to choose. Just say 'you're it' and you'll pick the next victim. You'll just sneeze out the chip and be on your way." He sipped from the water glass. "I'd suggest you choose someone who thinks himself a big success. Someone smug and self-satisfied. They're always the most fun to watch."

"Someone like you?"

Smith nodded. "That's the spirit. Get out all that anger. Maybe there's some banker or rich man who looks like me. You can get a vicarious revenge."

Roger had no use for a vicarious revenge right then. "Why not the real thing?" he asked, realizing he had the perfect answer. "You're it."

Smith laughed. "I'm afraid others have tried that. No, the rules are it can't be one of us."

Roger's felt like he had fallen down a well.

"So who are you going to choose? Who are you going to condemn to this fate? I admit I find this part of the game the most fascinating. Will you go for revenge on some poor slob who crosses you? Will you try to be noble, until you are so starved that nobility seems beside the point? Will you do it accidentally, like poor Kris? There are so many options."

"You bastard!"

"Yes, I *am* one, aren't I?" Smith's laugh was practically a giggle. "But you don't have to decide right now. Take your time. Think about it. It's more entertaining that way."

"That's all human lives are to you?" Roger was almost shouting, but no one in the restaurant even looked their way. "Entertainment?"

"Of course, Roger," Smith said, obviously enjoying Roger's anger. "What else?"

Continued on page 71

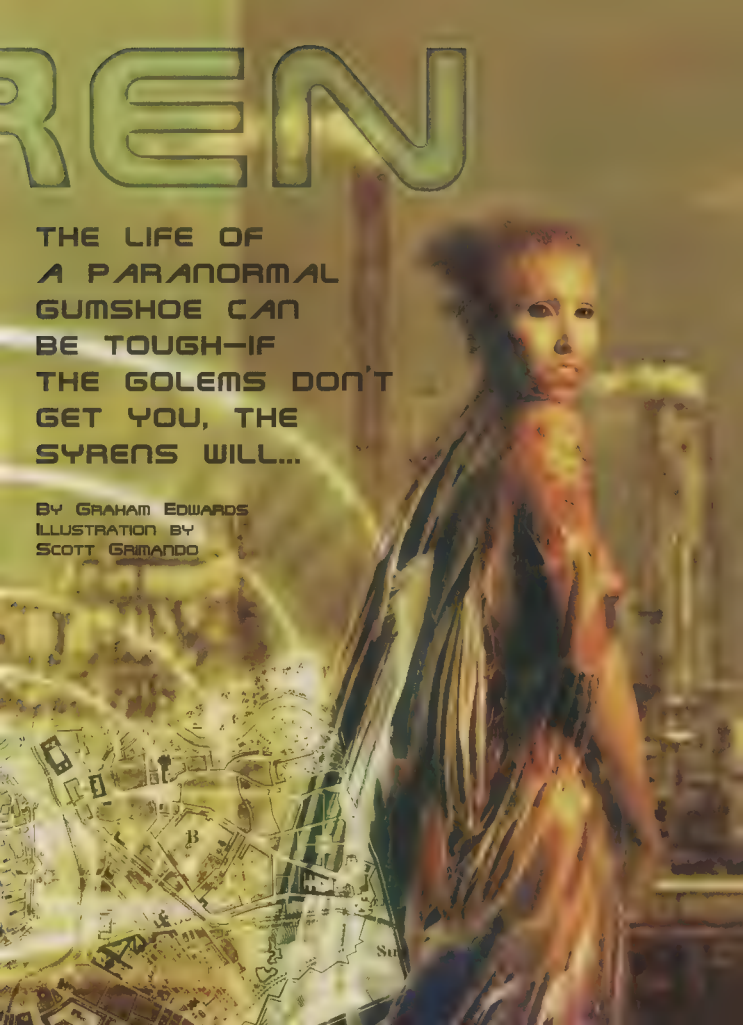
comes around—if you're lucky and smart.

S.V.F

REN

THE LIFE OF A PARANORMAL GUMSHOE CAN BE TOUGH—IF THE GOLEMS DON'T GET YOU, THE SYRENS WILL...

By Graham Edwards
Illustration by Scott Grimando



I don't usually make house calls. I just sit in my office and wait for the next client to walk in out of the rain. Or fly in on the end of a bullet (which happens more often than I'd like—count the stains on the carpet if you don't believe me)

Either way, it's the clients who come to me. Don't ask me why. It just happens that way.

When it doesn't, that usually means trouble.

I was just finishing up the paperwork on one of the messiest cases I ever got mixed up in (a nasty sibling rivalry affair involving Gog, Magog, and a very large pair of concrete boots) when the phone rang.

Now, I answer the phone about as often as I make a house call. Somehow it just isn't my style. But this time, so help me, I picked up the receiver and said,

"Yeah?"

"Silverback here."

"I'm listening."

Five words in and already I didn't like the way the conversation was headed. Captain Silverback runs the local cop shop. It's a competitive job. Some say new blood's needed but somehow Silverback keeps hanging in there.

"I need a favor," said Silverback.

"Surprise me."

Silverback said there was someone I should pay a visit, and gave me an address but no name. The address sounded familiar but I couldn't quite place it. I scribbled it down. I was about to mention I didn't make house calls when Silverback reminded me why I owed the favor.

"You remember a certain shoot out? At a certain bar? When a certain Captain of Police stepped in at the last minute and saved your skin?"

"I thought you'd have forgotten that by now, Silverback."

"Like an elephant, me."

"So if I do this, we're quits?"

"Solve this one," said Silverback, "and I'll never ask you for another favor again."

I threw down the receiver and went back to my paperwork. But I couldn't concentrate. I was mad at having my strings pulled. Damn Silverback! And damn doing favors for cops!

I tried to work but my eyes kept wandering to the address I'd scribbled down. Then they kept wandering to the big map on the wall. I kept calling them back but they kept not coming. In the end I gave in.

The map's one of those gimmicky new p-brane affairs. The front of the map shows the usual four dimensions, but if you look at it sideways you can see all the other seven dimensions folded up neatly inside. You can zoom in and out and overlay the map with all kinds of fancy stuff like weather, traffic, and continental drift. Also, it lights up.

The address Silverback had given me turned out to be at the center of a local industrial hell hole. I got a sinking feeling. I highlighted the location with a floating wormhole and activated the map's personality.

"Satellite view," I said.

"Oh, if you insist," the map replied. "Although you do realize that my first priority, given that you have already selected a destination, is to compute your optimum route and estimated journey time."

"Just do it," I said, "or I'm trading you in for a road atlas."

The satellite view showed a sprawling industrial complex surrounded by clouds of dense, yellow smoke and jags of lightning. From the middle of a forest of fat chimneys and fusion globes rose a bright ivory tower. At the top the tower, picked out in orange

sounded like heavy artillery

But you don't know what. So you want to find out

lately ... I have been having doubts

Why?

button clyr

And here you are

pocket

Face Front

This is Donny's handwriting," I asked. Carr nodded. "Any idea what it means?"

I am not without my resources. And I must tell you, it galls me that I have to resort to a third-rate gumshoe to get to the bottom of this.

with a sound like a tsunami. I didn't like to think what the inside of its visor must look like.

obnoxious men I'd ever met.

Pushing my chair away from the table, I unfolded my fedora and rammed it on my head.

Goodbye.

ached over to the window.

"Would you care to reconsider your position?" he said.

bring out the big guns."

Like I couldn't guess what was coming.

"Will you or will you not," said Carr, "take this case?"

lightning all the way.

The magic words, please, sleuth."

I said leave it with me.

Static electricity arced up from a nearby generating station, searing the air three feet from my nose.

"Not good enough!" said Theo Carr.

The golem squeezed its fingers together.

This was exactly why I never made house calls.

"All right," I said, gritting my teeth. "I'll take the case."

It was raining when I got back to my office. But then it's always raining outside my office. Don't ask me why.

I checked the mail, drank some coffee, tried to forget Theo Carr and his damned golems. Failed.

It wasn't that Carr had scared me. Old buzzards like that don't scare me. It's just that sudden death, generally, is something I try to avoid.

I spent a few minutes agonizing about whether to actually proceed with the investigation or not. But, when it came down to it, I had no choice. Old buzzard or not, Theo Carr had gotten me to say the magic words. And, so help me, my word is my bond. You might think guys like me don't have any honor but believe me, sometimes it's all we *do* have. Call it integrity, call it the professional approach. I call it trouble.

GRAY ARCHITECTURE SULKED BENEATH THE HOT, YELLOW SMOG. HUGE TANGLES OF PIPEWORK LAY NESTED LIKE JACKSTRAWS, LEAKING SHINY WASTE OVER STORAGE TANKS AND GRIMY METAL CATWALKS. FLAMES BELCHED, SMOKE SPURTED—IT WAS WORSE THAN HADES.

There were two places I could start. I could put my own tail on Donny Carr. Or I could check out the scrap of paper his father had given me.

I imagined standing on a windy street corner, waiting for Donny Carr to sneak from his apartment while icy rain poured down the back of my neck and thunderbirds tried to drop giant guano-bombs on my head.

THE THING IS, HOWEVER WELL YOU CONTROL THEM, SYRENS ARE DYNAMITE. THEY'VE GOT THIS FUNDAMENTAL ENERGY INSIDE THEM THAT BURNS LIKE A SUPERNOVA. HELL, THEY'RE PRACTICALLY NUCLEAR.

Then I imagined staying in my office, drinking strong coffee and working my brain

No contest

I looked at the words on the piece of paper. *Foxe Prosb*. No bells rang

I went through the motions—checked the telephone directories, tried the usual reference books—and came up with zip. It wasn't a name and it wasn't a place. Not that I'd expected to find anything—Theo Carr had probably gone through the same routine.

I toyed with the idea of delving inside my filing cabinet for clues. There's a search engine inside one of the drawers that can find pretty much anything. Trouble is, the fare can be catastrophically high. Anyway, I had a hunch I could spend a year researching those two words and still get nowhere.

But there was still the paper itself.

I peered at the paper through a magnifying glass. I carbon-dated it and held it up to the light. I weighed it and measured it and plotted its center of gravity. I broke it into its component molecules, sprayed it through a particle accelerator, and restored it to its original form. Twice. I scratched it and I sniffed it. I even asked it where it came from.

But the paper wasn't talking.

Frustrated, I threw myself back in my chair. Maybe I was losing my touch.

Or maybe I needed help.

I looked out into the rain. A neon sign on the other side of the street had flashed into life. The sign was advertising a new bar called Jimmy's.

I got me a hunch.

I checked my address book and, for the second time that day, used the telephone.

Then I went to the big map on the wall, found the place I was looking for, and stuck a pin in it. I climbed onto the pin, turned my coat inside-out twice until it was made of dragonskin, and let the north wind blow me south into the dark desert of Enigma.

[illegible] to greet me.

"Got dogfish?" he said.

I added [illegible]

I looked at Jimmy. He [illegible] thirty-[illegible] me he's working on [illegible] And I keep him regularly supplied. [illegible]

I made [illegible]

I knew it existed, [illegible] I had [illegible] to tell us [illegible] Bluebacks," I said. "The sort you like."

[illegible]

[illegible] And squid?"

[illegible]

Busty Bankjobs.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] beneath the undecided sun.

A word about Enigma.

It [illegible] If [illegible] some coats [illegible] ner where things are safe and solitary.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Noth

T

one, Jimmy in the other, studying his latest centerfold. There was just
us, the chairs, and the crate of stuff I'd brou

The Titans still

st breach but when

ting like news of a bank beis

the gang. They found six and a half of them

doesn't stop it from being the most heavily guarded vault you'll ever

don't see any teethmarks on you

again that weird shrug. Crac aced across the ceiling into the
corner of the room, where a square of plaster detached itself and
fell with a crash to the floo

now. Things need to change

ng of coming back to town

but Jimmy was getting bored with me

Jimmy, that's the reason

deputie

likely. "Too easy. Don't waste my time."

The door slammed and the shack was gone

three beers, Jimmy had said.
more bright.
start with the letter.

Do the same with the rest and you get this:
Club Molpe.

letter.

The case wasn't just ugly anymore.

Now it was *really* ugly.

For a second I thought seriously about going back on my word and just walking away from the whole mess. Because there was only one way this could end and that was with someone lying face down in a pool of blood.

And that someone could be me.

But if I walked away I'd be turning my back on more than just this case, wouldn't I? I'd be kissing the sleuthing business goodbye forever. A guy like me breaks his word and suddenly the clients stopped finding their way to his door. Don't ask me how it happens—it just does. And then what would I do? Sleuthing's all I know. It's what I do best.

No—more than that. It's what I *do*.

I thought about the motto I keep over my office door. It's a sappy thing, really; I only keep it there because it was there when I took over the business from Jimmy and, so help me, there's something about it that gets to me, you know, in the soft parts.

It's a sampler. There's a label on the back says it's woven from cosmic string but I'm pretty sure it's nylon. But it's the message I keep it for. It says:

First the client. Then the truth.

I looked at the words on the paper and said a curse that would have made a Titan blush. Club Molpe. That name could mean only one thing.

Syrens.

When I got back from Enigma, Donny Carr was waiting for me.

He was loitering in the doorway, feet in a puddle, hands knotted nervously. He was lean, handsome like a shop dummy, and looked very young. The skin around his eyes was gray and loose and he kept twitching his head to one side or the other, like he was listening for something. He introduced himself with a tremble in his voice.

"Pull up a chair," I said, sitting down. "Coffee?"

"No coffee, thanks," said Donny, still loitering. "I've, um, I've come to ask you a favor, Mr., er … I'm sorry—I don't know your name."

"It's on the door," I said, "from time to time. And as for favors, I do those about as often as I make house calls."

"Oh, er…"

I poured myself a triple espresso and leaned back until the leather creaked. Donny closed the door on the rain and sat hesitantly on the edge of the chair I keep for clients.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Carr?" I said.

"Drop the case!" Donny blurted. "Please!"

"Why should I do that?"

"You wouldn't understand."

I flicked the scrap of paper across the desk.

"Club Molpe," I said. "I figured it out."

Donny Carr's shoulders slumped.

"Please don't tell my father," he said. "He *really* wouldn't understand."

I studied the gray circles under his eyes. But there was something in his eyes that interested me more.

Is it a dame? I said. It was my day for hunches. Donny's eyes grew very wide. "Someone you met at Club Molpe?"

"It m-might be," said Donny.

"Is she human?"

"N-no."

"Care to tell me about it?"

I thought I knew all about syrens," said Donny Carr. "You know, how they're half-woman, half bird? Everybody knows that, just like they know the only place you'll find a syren these days is in some seedy back-alley bar And how it costs a fortune to get in "

I knew what he was talking about You'd be surprised how much a man will pay to hear a syren sing. You'd be just as surprised at how much his brain looks like oatmeal when it starts running out of his ears

I never go to places like that," Donny reassured me hastily He threw me a guileless smile that was somehow endearing. So help me, I actually found myself liking the poor sap "Syren-joints, I mean

But you like to party?" I said

You're only young once. My father's very ill. He wants to put me in charge of the biggest power-generating industry this side of the Lethe. I just want to have fun while I still can."

You don't want to run the family business?"

"Honestly? No. I've found out things recently about Carr Industries that would make your . well, let's just say I don't want any part of it. But that's not what this is about, or not entirely You see, last month I got invited to this party It was going to be my last fling before I settled down and started taking my responsibilities seriously. It was at this big club I'd never heard of

Club Molpe, by any chance?"

"Yes

Club Molpe is the biggest syren club in town. Its location is secret —even I don't know where it is. You only get there by special invitation Rich kids like Donny Carr are its bread and butter. Like most big clubs it's slicker than the back-street dives Joints like Club Molpe aren't into melting brains—they need a regular supply of loyal customers. So they soften up the shows

Not that it's not still a dangerous business

The thing is, however well you control them, syrens are dynamite They've got this fundamental energy inside them that burns like a supernova Hell, they're practically nuclear And highly addictive, of course. And it all comes out in their songs You listen to one of those chickens for more than a few minutes and you're hooked for life But what's worse is you're handing over your soul to the syren, slice by slice. The average soul takes about six months, assuming you visit the club once a week, but I've seen the lights go out in less than four

Of course, the entire racket's one hundred percent illegal

Oh, the cops keep promising to shut the whole syren circuit down, but they never do. Because guess who you'll find in the front rows of clubs like the Molpe and the Raidne and the infamous Thelxiep? That's right. the big suits who pay Captain Silverback's salary It's the big suits who order the little raids on the clubs that don't really count. And it's the same big suits who guarantee a steady flow of hard cash and soft, feathery bird-girls through the clubs that do

Clubs like Club Molpe

"So what happened?" I said

Donny took a deep breath

"I saw the show," he said. "I took precautions against getting hooked but ... one of the syrens ... I couldn't take my eyes off her She was beautiful—the most beautiful creature I'd ever seen I arranged to see her afterward—you can do things like that when your surname's Carr. So I went to her dressing room and ... that was it

"Meaning?" I closed my eyes I knew what was coming

"I fell in love with her "

I poured myself another coffee and knocked it back in one gulp

"Donny," I said, "you know syrens aren't capable of love? Whatever you feel about her, you can be damn sure she doesn't feel the same about you. All she wants to do is sing. If she doesn't sing she'll

"Leucosia's different," said Donny

"Leucosia?"

sucker to run his damned empire."

He'll catch you," I said, thinking about Theo Carr's golems. "And he'll string you up."

low me. You won't succeed."

"I will," I said in tears," said the thug

"Bring him to me alive."

to say, leaves something to be desired.

You can be very hurtful sometimes

shut up and follow that cab!"

forth it looked like a little red spider

caught in a place like that."

"I have been known to [illegible] pited it to your southern perimeter."

"Please be gentle with the pin! Aargh!"

rattled your bones too loud."

"Intriguing?" said the key.

That'll do."

The key disappeared into the room's lock. It rummaged quietly for a few seconds, then stuck its head out.

"Come," it said.

"No—hurry it up."

pick. In its spare time it sings soprano.)

feathers.

waited for the show to begin.

song like treacle through rocket fuel. I saw first double, then triple then I just lost count

Theo suspected Donny was seeing a syren. It bothered him. If it ever got out, Carr Industries would never survive the scandal. But he couldn't prove it. Donny's always been smart about covering his tracks—when you've got a father like Theo Carr it's a skill you develop pretty quickly. And Donny's a whiz with all the new surveillance technologies. Better than his old man, and better than my police force, I'm ashamed to say."

So what ... made you think ... I'd succeed ... where you failed? I managed to say. The words clotted in my mouth like stale cheese.

"Your skills have always been—how shall I put this?—variable. I had a hunch you'd be smart enough to track dear Donny to his lair, and stupid enough to leave a trail wide enough for me to follow. My hunch was right."

Syren-song sliced me in half and threw me to opposite sides of the lounge. I could *see* the music. It was yellow, searing, sun-hot yellow. *Yellow?* The music peeled my mind and pureed the contents. It burned like ice and filled me up with frozen flames. Somewhere among the debris I found my mouth and gasped

I LOOKED AROUND TO SEE A DAME HAD SLIPPED INTO THE BOOTH BESIDE ME. I'D BEEN SO ENGROSSED WITH THE SYREN'S PERFORMANCE I HADN'T NOTICED A THING. AND BELIEVE ME, THIS DAME WAS WORTH NOTICING.

"Leave the hunches ... to the experts."

Silverback laughed.

"And there's more. Do you want to know why Theo Carr was so keen to check up on his son? I'll have to tell you now because, in about sixty seconds, the only thing you'll care about is where your next fix of bird-girl is coming from. One minute from now, gumshoe, you won't care about anything but the music.

"You know what happens to a syren if she doesn't sing? Of course you do. She goes nuclear. Hold that thought. Now, did you ever hear of a retirement home for elderly syrens? No? I'll tell you why not. Because when they've reached the end of their careers in stinking dives like this, when their voices start to break and they can't weave the magic like they used to, they take a one-way trip to a place

where they can perform a useful function for once."

One of Theo Carr's power plants!" I said. I'd found my hands. It felt like they were at the ends of my feet. But somehow I'd managed to clamp them over my ears. It didn't stop the syren song, but it did allow me to think again. "Yellow smog! Like the music."

Ten seconds," said Silverback. "Goodbye, gumshoe. Thanks for the lead. I'll take it from here."

On the stage the syren—all green feathers and smooth skin and cold, black eyes—was singing higher and higher. Her voice was like a gimlet, stabbing first my mind, then my lungs, then the parts of my body I prefer to keep for private moments. It was hell—and it was indescribably heavenly. I felt myself breaking apart.

Some part of me—it must have been my hand—scrabbled in my pocket. Another part—maybe my mind—wished I'd brought a gun. I brought out the only thing I could find: the little skeleton key.

Fortissimo," I managed to whisper.

And the skeleton key broke into song.

The effect was instantaneous. The syren, suddenly aware of this new soprano voice punching through the rancid air, stopped singing and glowered at our booth. If there's one thing syrens hate, it's competition. They're such divas.

I TWISTED A LOCAL BRANE-SPACE INTO A PSEUDO-CYLINDRICAL MESH, WHICH CREATED A VIRTUAL WORMHOLE WITH BILATERAL SYMMETRY AND A TENDENCY TO YAW TOWARD THE NINTH DIMENSION.

Reaching across the table, I plunged my hand down the front of Silverback's dress. She stared at me furiously as I drew out the gold pendant. I traced the monogram before her ice-cold eyes: a "C" in a circle.

"Since when did you work for Theo Carr?" I said.

I like to keep the big wheels oiled," said Silverback.

"I'll just bet you do."

There was a sudden commotion near the stage. Heads turned to stare: mine and Silverback's included.

The syren who'd just performed was teetering on the edge of the stage. The men at the nearest table were stroking her bare legs with

Donny! Don't! Please forgive me!"

to my ears all the same.

promised!"

worked! You knew that. You always knew that!"

it work!"

robbed my legs of all their strength.

shrieked.

the shrieks like it had the music.

and leave me alone!"

through the pain barrier.

cash.

out a sound.

in a widening scar

ted pool.

I turned to face Captain Silverback.

"Happy now?" she growled.

was and held it to my head.

office . . ." she began.

"Which you illegally bugged," I snapped.

discovery.

burn coal."

Outside Jimmy's shack, the sphinx was stalking a herd of elephants through a forest of dwarf conifers. The trees were going over like dominoes. The sun was nowhere to be seen but the sky was filled with stars and I mean *filled*. That's the galactic core for you. It was brighter than insparation and hotter than Apollo's crotch. I was glad I was indoors. When I visit Enigma I usually am.

As Jimmy rifled through the stuff I'd brought him, I talked.

"Silverback must have been in Theo Carr's pocket for years. I always wondered why the cops were so reluctant to shut down the svren clubs. Now I know.

"That'll change," said Jimmy, picking out a fresh copy of *Peephole*.

"Now you mention it," I said, "how did you swing it, Jimmy? I mean, how do you go from being Public Enemy Number One to—as Theo Carr put it—the top cop?"

Jimmy flipped briefly into a couple of distant futures, then scratched his noses and said:

"Simple really. I twisted the local brane-space into a pseudo-cylindrical mesh, which created a virtual wormhole with bilateral symmetry and a tendency to vaw toward the ninth dimension. After that, I just derived Silverback's genome from a digital database I plan to hack into next week, spliced in a sample of my own mitochondria, overlaid it with Silverback's optimum sinus rhythm, and reprogrammed the police computer system with a retrovirus that implants into every cop's brain enhancer the autosuggestion that Jimmy the Griff is the natural successor to the disgraced, though undeniably sexy, Captain Silverback. Which makes me the new Captain of Police. So simple a child could've done it. Now, you bring me a coelacanth like you promised?"

I tossed him the primeval fish. Around Jimmy's chair were piled the squirming insides of the clams I'd brought. He'd already eaten most of the shells. As I watched, his time-aura shifted and his hair grew down to his feet, then turned white and fell out. Newly bald, he looked up at me and grinned.

"Good fish," he said.

"Did you ever have to deal with svrens?" I said. "Before I bought the business off you and you turned to a life of crime and then took over the police force, I mean."

Jimmy shrugged and opened the centerfold of *Peephole*. The natural flow of time puddled on the floor beneath his chair, turning his feet into flippers. I could tell he'd lost interest again. Nearly time to go.

I wish I'd had the son as a client," I sighed, "instead of the father." I picked a stray lump of wax from my ear and flicked it across the room. I thought about the smoky air of the club and the sound of the syren's scream. I thought about the restraining belts on the chairs. I thought about Donny Carr and wondered how he was going to pick up the pieces of his life. "That way I might have got to the truth a bit quicker."

Jimmy looked up from his magazine.

"First the client," he said, "then the truth. My mother said that once."

"I know," I said. "I've still got her sampler.

"Clam?"

"I don't like seafood.

"Got chicken."

"Thanks. I'll pass. When do you start the new job?"

"When I'm good and ready. Time is such a flexible thing, don't you find?"

I got up, turned my coat inside-out three times until it was made of sharkskin, and stepped out of the shack. The dwarf forest was gone, the elephants were gone. The sphinx was nowhere to be seen. There was just a vast ocean, and the rain.

I pulled up my collar and began the long journey home. ❧

the devil and mrs. comstock's sn

The house stood at the quiet intersection of a pair of tree-strewn streets. It was an unassuming building, two whitewashed stories, cheery blue shutters, and a neat lawn framed by a woodpost fence. Yellow and lavender pansies bloomed in tidy clusters at the base of a brick chimney.

Byron Lewis double-checked the address on the scrap of printout. After his last string of assignments, he'd been braced for something more freakish or at least unusual. The last place his editor had sent him had kept an altar to Thor, complete with sacred hammer, in the front yard. Before that had been the Vampire Safe House with the neon fangs on the marquee, full of kids in black eyeliner with an array of bat and skull accessories eager to regale him with tales of their nocturnal awakenings and Dracula-worship. And then there had been the snake cult. Byron shuddered. He vowed never again to get caught napping at a press conference if only his editor would stop foisting these whack-job assignments on him.

Byron parked his car on the street, debating with himself whether or not he should pull the CD player and take it with him. A cursory glance showed that car jackings and thefts were bogies of *elsewhere* to the residents of this neighborhood. Next door, a bicycle leaned against a tree, unattended, a pair of roller blades flung carelessly beside it. Across the street, a windsock in rainbow colors fluttered from a porch, while an unseen wind chime jangled its fluid cacophony.

This had to be a mistake, or his editor was having a laugh, keeping him off balance and wondering. Byron got out, resigned. He'd driven an hour to get here; may as well follow through. It wouldn't be the first time he'd wasted an afternoon on a lunatic's scavenger hunt. And if he dawdled here, he could head home afterward and claim a full day on his timesheet, rather than spend the afternoon in his airless cubicle, pretending to be busy.

Evil is where you find it—even curled up on a comfy couch enjoying a belly rub.

ickerdoodles

by Eugie Foster
illustration by Lori Koeroed

A faded couch rested on the porch, its threadbare cushions still damp from the morning rain. Byron adjusted his tie and checked his hair in the front window before ringing the doorbell.

Long seconds passed. His finger was poised on the button for another try when he heard the deadbolt rattle. The door opened, releasing a waft of warm air thick with old-time bakery smells—cinnamon, vanilla, and fresh bread. A plain-looking woman with her graying hair pulled into a neat bun squinted at him through plastic-rimmed glasses. She wore a sleeveless flannel shirt over a pair of capri leggings. It accented the thickness of her waist, her plump arms, and spindly ankles. Grungy white slippers completed the unflattering ensemble.

"Hello, there," she said. "Are you with the homeowners association?"

"No, ma'am. My name's Byron Lewis." He extended his hand. "I'm a reporter with the *Daily Gazette*."

The woman's eyes lit up, and she all but dragged him inside with her vigorous handshake. "Is this about the e-mail my husband sent?"

Byron extracted his hand with a wince. "Yes, ma'am. At least I think so. About a devil you've got imprisoned in your house?"

"Robert!" the woman hollered. "There's a reporter here about Mr. Bane." She lowered her voice. "We call him Mr. Bane. We figure it's more sociable than Lucifer or Satan, for the neighbors you know. They're so fussy. They'd probably want to fine us or put a lien on our house if they knew about him." The woman pulled the front door closed, nudging Byron into the foyer.

An overweight man in sweatpants and a long-sleeved t-shirt appeared in the hallway behind her. His colorless hair was thin on top, but grew past his ears on the sides. He wore a pair of bright green socks, one of which had a hole in the toe.

"Would you mind taking off your shoes, Mr. Lewis?" the woman asked. "I just vacuumed."

"Natalie," the man protested, "don't go telling strangers to take off their shoes."

"No, that's all right," Byron said. "I don't mind." He stepped out of his penny loafers. "You must be Robert Comstock. I'm Byron Lewis with the *Daily Gazette*."

The man grinned and grabbed Byron's hand. His handshake was less teeth rattling than his wife's had been, but he made up for it in grip. Byron wondered if he'd still be able to hold a pen with his mashed fingers.

"You've met Natalie, my wife, so why don't we all go into the living room?"

Byron followed Robert Comstock into a sunny room with a fireplace. A comfortable sectional upholstered in butterscotch velour faced both fireplace and entertainment center, offset by a worn coffee table. The centerpiece was a big screen television. It was muted, but had on a show where wallaby joeys peeped from their mothers' pouches.

Natalie Comstock aimed a remote and switched off the set. "Would you like something to drink, Mr. Lewis? We have soda and coffee."

"Just water would be great."

Mr. Comstock settled on one end of the sectional as Byron took out a digital recorder and a pad of paper. When his wife returned, she set Byron's ice water on the coffee table, carefully centered on a plastic coaster, and passed a diet cola to her husband.

"So you got my e-mail?" he asked. He peeled back the soda's flip tab and handed it back to his wife.

"Actually, it went to my editor. He assigned the story to me."

"And you're going to write a feature on us?" Mrs. Comstock plunked down beside her husband.

Byron forced a jovial grin. "It's not every day you get an e-mail from folks claiming they've caught a devil."

"Not a devil," Mr. Comstock said. "*The* Devil. The Evil One. Mephistopheles, the Prince of Lies."

"Bob! You didn't say we had him locked up or anything, did you?" Natalie rolled her eyes. "My husband can get a bit theatrical, Mr. Lewis."

Mr. Comstock scowled. "You don't have Satan imprisoned in your home?"

"Gracious, no. We'd be a pair of loonies if we thought that, wouldn't we?"

Actually, Byron's hope had been to salvage this fiasco with a humor article, but now even that seemed unlikely. He slipped his notepad back into his pocket and wondered whether he'd have time to pick up his shirts at the dry cleaners before they closed.

"He's got free run of the place, of course," she continued. "What would it say about the Lord of Darkness if Robert and I could force him to stay here against his will? Not much of a supreme opponent to God if you could lock him away like a common felon."

"We don't let him upstairs in our bedroom, do we?" Mr. Comstock said. "That's what I meant by contained, Mr. Lewis. He stays in the kitchen mostly, keeps my wife company. He likes her better than me. Won't give me the time of day if she's around."

Mrs. Comstock dropped a kiss on her husband's cheek. "Don't get in a snit, honey. Mr. Bane likes you well enough. He just prefers being with me when I'm cooking."

"So, the Devil is here?" Byron asked.

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Comstock said.

"In this room?"

"Of course not. He's not invisible or anything. Mr. Bane is having a nap. You can meet him when he wakes up."

A buzzer sounded in another room. "That's the pie. Excuse me while I pop it out and get the bread going." Mrs. Comstock stood and bustled away.

Mr. Comstock took a sip from his wife's abandoned can and made a face. "I can't stand this diet glop she drinks. Anyway, you were wanting to know about Mr. Bane."

"Could you start at the beginning?"

"Sure can. It was about three years ago at a homeowners association meeting. I don't know why Nat makes us go to those things. They were arguing about bylaws and arguing about some neighborhood dogs barking at night. Us, we don't mind barking. Natalie likes dogs. Woman's got a soft spot for all animals. She'd want to give a polar bear a pet and cuddle if she saw one. Probably still be cooing about how adorable it was as it chewed her up."

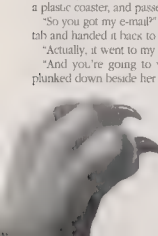
"The Devil was at your homeowners association meeting," Byron prompted.

"And making an unpleasant afternoon absolutely miserable. As soon as it seemed like there'd be some consensus or a move for a vote, people would start arguing again. I thought the Leitzes and the Steins were going to do violence on each other about some recycling bin trouble."

"How'd you know it was the Devil? Did he have horns and cloven hooves?"

"What? Of course not. That would've given those busybodies a fright. Serve them right, attracting the Devil here and all, but no, he didn't have anything infernal about him. Kept for occasionally his eyes sort of glowed, but only in the shadows."

"Anyway, Natalie saw what was going on, same's me, and realized we'd be stuck with those bickering birdbrains all day if she didn't do something. So she offered Mr. Bane a snickerdoodle—she bakes



fiery eyes glared at him, both intensity of them as

them from scratch, always brings them to meetings, not that anyone ever thanks her for her trouble. Old Nick gobbled that cookie like he was starving. She gave him another one, and then the whole plate, and while he was stuffing his face, the committee called a quorum vote on a couple agenda items. The McGee widow—she lives in the house catty-corner to us—moved to call it a day and push off the other items until next time. Then, what do you know? Linda Tupper seconds it, everyone votes "yea," and we're on our way home. Except there's three of us on the sidewalk: Natalie, Me, and Mr. Bane.

"Now, I'm not so keen on having the Devil follow us home. But Natalie, being the way she is, when she realized he was coming with us, invited him to dinner—macaroni and cheese casserole and fresh baked blackberry pie for dessert." Mr. Comstock smacked his lips. "He really appreciated her cooking too. Had two helpings of pie, and then straightaway fell asleep on our couch. When he woke up, he was hungry again, so I fixed him a midnight snack—I like to have a glass of milk and couple cookies before bedtime, myself. It was so late then, it would've been rude to kick him out. Natalie set three places for breakfast, and, well, he's been here since."

"And how does that make you feel, living with the Devil?"

"The way I see it—"

Just then, Mrs. Comstock returned. Tagging at her ankles was the fattest cat Byron had ever seen. It resembled a furry, tortoiseshell-colored basketball. Its legs were short, barely able to keep the pudge of its belly from dragging on the floor. It waddled after her, sausage-like tail waving like a banner.

Mrs. Comstock parked herself beside her husband. The cat gave a heave and propped its front paws on the couch. It peered up through several folds of fat obscuring its eyes and twitched its tail.

Mrs. Comstock leaned over and boosted the animal up beside her. "Now you're just being lazy."

The cat slumped on its side as she stroked it.

"He's perfectly capable of climbing up on his own," Mr. Comstock explained. "But he knows that Nat will haul him up if he looks plaintive at her."

"Sorry about the interruption," Mrs. Comstock said. "What were you boys talking about when I came in?"

"Mr. Lewis was asking what we thought about having Mr. Bane here."

"He's a good houseguest," Mrs. Comstock answered. "Quiet, always appreciative about my cooking, and one of the best listeners anybody could want. He can get sort of insistent when it comes to mealtimes, and we've given up trying to cut down on snacks. But there are benefits to having the Devil as a guest."

"Like what?"

"Don't have to worry about petty evils," Mr. Comstock answered. "He keeps an eye on us, makes sure we don't run afoul of anything under what you might call His jurisdiction."

"And he's comforting at night," Mrs. Comstock said. "I used to be afraid of the dark, ever since I was a little girl. But since Mr. Bane came to live with us, I've never worried about nighttime. What spook or burglar's going to bother us? We got the Devil here."

"But the rub is," Mr. Comstock said. "We haven't had a vacation in three years. Can't leave the house for more than a few hours, or Mr. Bane gets really grumpy about missing a meal. And you don't want to see him when he's mad. It's all brimstone and firestorms, and eternal damnation this and curses that."

"He doesn't mean it," Mrs. Comstock said. "Soon as you give him a slice of pie or a cookie, he becomes sweet as candy."

"But on account of his temper," Mr. Comstock continued, "we haven't seen my brother and his kids in three years. They live across the country, so we can't just drive down for a visit and drive back in an afternoon. We've missed three Christmases and three years of birthdays now, and it makes us sad, thinking we're drifting apart from family. After all, family's the most important thing there is."

"I see your problem," Byron said.

"That's when I decided to e-mail your paper. We figure you're the most widely read publication in the county. We thought about posting something on the Internet, but you never know what kind of loonies you might attract online. I'm betting your readers are more likely to be the sort of people Mr. Bane gets along with, folks like us who understand the worth of homemade peach cobbler."

Byron flipped through his notepad to give himself time to compose himself. He prided himself on his professionalism, being able to keep a straight face under the most unlikely circumstances, but these two had strained him to his limit. Still, he had to admit a certain fondness for the Comstocks. As far as delusions went, theirs was harmless, charming even.

He cleared his throat. "So, uh, when do you think Mr. Bane might wake up so I can meet him?"

Mrs. Comstock sank her fingers into the cat's fur. "Oh, he woke up when I was in the kitchen. He's pretty attuned to kitchen noises, aren't you, Mr. Bane?"

The cat rolled onto his back, sticking all four paws into the air. Byron had seen his share of cats, and he was reasonably certain they were supposed to have round paws, the kind with retractable claws. This animal's thick nails extended past the pads, like a dog's. And its face, though plump and furry, had a pointed muzzle like a weasel's—albeit a fat weasel. It rubbed an ear with a front paw, a look of comical deliberation on its face.

"That's the Devil?" Before Byron could squelch it, a chortle burst out, and once started, he couldn't stop. A deep belly laugh doubled him over until tears ran down his face.

When he could sit up again, wiping his eyes and chuckling, the Comstocks were on their feet, their eyes and mouths in identical O's of alarm.

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Comstock said. "Mr. Bane doesn't like being laughed at."

The cat or dog, or whatever it was, had departed during Byron's spasm of mirth.

"He doesn't take kindly to it at all," Mr. Comstock said. "Pride, you know."

Mrs. Comstock peered under the coffee table. "Did you see where he went?"

"Better turn on CNN."

Byron's cell phone jangled in his pocket. The caller ID warned him it was his editor, but it didn't prepare him for the panic-stricken babble on the other end. In the ensuing bedlam of "sugar-riots-Bermuda-tanker-stock-exchange-hijacking-Somalian-pirates-Davidson is quitting," only one thing was clear. Mass calamity had broken out over the AP wire, and he was needed at the *Daily Gazette* office.

On the television, scenes of masked gunmen filled the screen; smoke plumed black and thick from the burning car behind them. The camera tipped and jostled, showing an unfocused image of stampeding legs before going to white static.

Mrs. Comstock wrung her hands together. "This is all my fault. I should never let you send that e-mail, Robert. We could've invited John and the kids over for Thanksgiving." Fat tears oozed from Mrs.

Continued on page 71

compelling and repulsive, the heavy as a fist around his heart.

Number of the Bus

By Jay Lake

ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREA WICKLUND

Here is wisdom: Let him who hath understanding count the number of the bus, for it is the number of a wizard: and his number is four thousand five hundred and seventeen. Or maybe four thousand four hundred and twenty-two.

Eleutherio knew the buses the way some people know their own bedrooms in the dark. He'd been born on the number 12, during the late-night run. The bus number had been 4517. That coach had been retired the day of his fourth birthday, leaving only the 517, three primes which themselves added to form a fourth prime replacing the four which had been traded away. This meant great luck and skill to Eleutherio.

Fourteen months later Tri-Met reassigned the number to coach 4422, which had been involved in a fatality collision on SE Grand Avenue with a drunken pedestrian named Pretty McTeague.

No reason, the drivers had said over coffee at Niki's on the corner of SE Grand and SE Morrison. Niki's sat right at the west end of the Morrison Bridge, where the roadbed climbed skyward on concrete pillars and the routes crossed over both each other on the streets below and, more importantly, running water. Morrison Street, of course, did not actually cross the Mormon Bridge, a circumstance of great benefit to the downtown wizards in the confusion the naming caused.

But everyone knew that spirits were drawn to even numbers, because they could live in the cracks left behind by the influence of 2, the only even prime. And so after a series of shattered mirrors and two driver heart attacks in the months following the pedestrian's death, 4422 became 4517.

Eleutherio's bus, complete with the restless spirit of Pretty McTeague. And the death coach took back the four-prime magic of his 517, too.

When 4517 started running the number 12 route again, Eleutherio had to ride the bus, out of sheer self preservation.

Every wizard—downtown, grassland, or transit—knows that magic comes from stories. They just find their stories in different ways.

Downtown wizards use the numbers of money, scrying in the stock pages of the *Wall Street Journal* and *The Oregonian*. For their kind, the serial number on a chance-discovered five-dollar bill can call spirits from the not so-vasty deeps of the Willamette faster and better than any hoary tome of old Europe. Numbers talk to a downtown wizard.

Grassland wizards watch the patterns of sheep in the fields in the Willamette Valley, and wait for rabbits in the morning mist. Their kind read tracks and the flocking of crows to move the ways of old lady Earth, and it is Her children who speak their stories to grassland wizards. They bring the rains when the sun has been too kind, and soothe the harsh gait of winter's passing.

But Eleutherio was a transit wizard. Or would be, someday, if he was allowed to finish growing up. Transit wizards get their stories from drunks trudging shopping carts under bridges, and the rumble of truck tires on I-5. A good transit wizard can weave a worldchange from the jeremiads of a bus-riding Korean War vet high on Sterno, and save the lives of dozens of children suffering from diphtheria in a North Portland slum.

And buses were nothing but giant story sieves, passing through crowds of illegals, junkies, the desperate and the driven. Happy and prosperous people rarely rode the bus.

Eleutherio was neither happy nor prosperous. Instead, he was twelve. The age of his route number. He sometimes wondered what it might have meant to ride the 66X bus—would he have been forced to grow old before claiming his place in the world, or would some *nombrejo* have made a cipher ing for him to break his route number into something younger.

Twelve, on the number 12 bus which carried a portion of his powers, where the past few years had done nothing to quell the restless spirit.

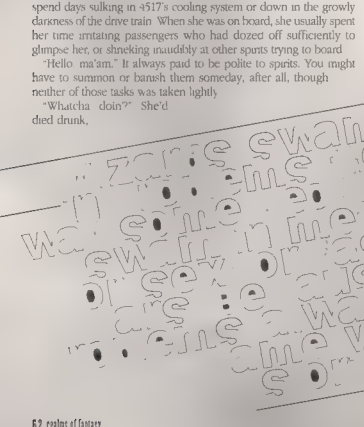
Pretty McTeague sat down next to him while Eleutherio was scanning the license plates of passing traffic for three-digit primes and felicitous sequences. It was summer in Portland, uncomfortably warm except in the air-conditioned space of the bus.

"Hey, kid," the dead woman said.

This surprised him. McTeague usually ignored Eleutherio. She could spend days sulking in 4517's cooling system or down in the growly darkness of the drive train. When she was on board, she usually spent her time irritating passengers who had dozed off sufficiently to glimpse her, or shrieking inaudibly at other spirits trying to board.

"Hello ma'am." It always paid to be polite to spirits. You might have to summon or banish them someday, after all, though neither of those tasks was taken lightly.

"Whatcha doin'?" She'd died drunk,



and she always seemed a little drunk to Eleutherio. *State permanence*, that was called. He thought of it as stubbornness.

"Riding," he said. Eleutherio gave up on license plates. This woman, after all, was the reason his powers were so closely bound into the bus. As he'd grown older, 4517 had become an increasingly powerful bus. It rarely met red lights, and even the mighty locomotives of the Union Pacific hesitated to pull into its way at the 11th/12th Avenue grade crossing.

Some people had said this was McTeague's doing, but Eleutherio always knew where 4517 was, even if it was at the Powell garage, or off on event shuttle service. When it ran the number 12 route, 4517 was as close to him as his beating heart.

"Nah." She would have spit on him as she talked, had she been corporeal enough for spittle. Pretty McTeague hadn't been, despite her parents' apparent hopes. Death had not improved her. "Ridin' people. . . get off." She winked at him. "Ever'body who gets on gets off. Get off, off on the bus. Get it? *Come* on." She brayed a drunken laugh that caused several drowsing passengers to jerk awake and stare around in confusion.

"No," said Eleutherio, who did in fact know what she meant. He'd been told, over and over, give nothing to a spirit that wasn't bound to you. Not even the time of day. Time was numbers, after all. Numbers were everything, the order of the world.

She leaned over so close her face started to merge with his, then whispered as if anyone else on the bus could hear her anyway. "I got me a problem, kid. You ain't ridin', you watchin'." Good brown eyes on you, like a dog on the hunt. You hunt out my problem, I'll make it worth your while."

There was little enough Eleutherio wanted from a spirit, especially at his age. Older, with hair on his chest and wrapped in life-numbers, he might take a servant. Now . . . she was nothing but the idiot whose death had given him his powers, then tied them to this bus.

But problems were why wizards existed. Wizards swam in problems the way some people swam in meth, or sex, or fast cars. Because problems always came with stories.

"So what's your problem?"

"Heh. You'd like to know." She settled away from him, crossing her arms as she transformed to a truculent drunk. "Nobody gets nothing from pretty little me."

That was random, even for a spirit. He tried the smallest summoning: a naked name. "It's alright, Miss McTeague."

Something sparked around her face. She jerked in her seat, shouted unintelligibly as the bus cornered onto NW 5th.

"What's your problem?"

She shifted through multiple phases, her face flickering in and out of expressions like a runaway factorial. A sad-eyed young woman settled out of the blur. Pretty McTeague not as she had died, but as she might have lived some years before that date. "Someone's calling me back, kid. I don't want to go."

Calling her back? That was big magic, especially after all this time. She'd been dead, what . . . four years. The longer they were gone, if they hung around at all, the more fragmented the spirits of the dead became.

"So what do you want to do?" he asked softly. "You want to move on?" Eleutherio controlled his sense of excitement. If she were unbound from the bus, he should be able to get his strength away from bus 4517, carry it within him. As it stood, he was only powerful on this coach, on the number 12 route.

"No." The truculent drunk filtered back into her face. "Want to stay here. My bus. Comfor'ble. Takes care of me. Don' want to be called back nowhere. Don' want to go on nowhere."

Hope faded, his chest growing heavy. Still . . . to help her could be right. And it might do something to address his relationship with the bus and his bound powers.

"So you want to stay here." Statement, not question. Don't challenge the drunk

"Yeah." She glared at him, her eyes bloody-red as they must have been at the moment of her death

Eleutherio had seen a number of spirits in various dread guises on the buses, but this still gave him pause. "Who's calling you?"

Now her face was so mournful as to be comic. "I am."

Eleutherio closed his eyes and counted to seven. She was crazed. All spirits were crazed, to some degree. Death was not a state that overlapped much with sanity. But Pretty McTeague had lost all logic, even the logic of story.

When he opened his eyes, she was still there. "I am sorry," he said, "but I cannot help you." He closed his eyes again and began to factor nine-digit numbers in the wizard's quietus within his head.

Later, when he got off the back of the bus to find some lunch, he saw Pretty McTeague getting on at the front. A living woman, who looked just like his bus spirit. In the flesh, she wore hip hugger jeans and a blue and white striped halter top. Eleutherio raced after the bus as it pulled away, but the driver had grown tired of him and wasn't cutting any slack.

A lot of the Tri-Met drivers knew the wizards kept their buses quiet and safe, but either this one didn't know about the transit wizards, or he didn't know Eleutherio was in the process of becoming one himself.

"Damn," he said quietly, though the *nombrejos* would whip him for disrespect once the wind told them of his transgression.

All through his taco from Pardo's, Eleutherio tried to follow the bus in his head. 4517 was *his* bus. He *always* knew where it was.

Not today.

After he'd finished eating, he waited for coach 4517 along the number 12 route until the sun dipped below the West Hills and evening's damp chill crept over the city, but the bus never came back. And he still couldn't find it in his head.

Which was wrong.

First of all, he knew the routes intimately. 4517 shouldn't have gone out of service right after lunchtime. It would have rolled til shift change 3:38, then either headed for the Powell garage or done another shift til the route went to the evening schedule.

And besides that, it was his damned bus.

The dead woman had come to life, climbed on board, and the bus had vanished.

He could go ask for help, but Eleutherio knew that if he went to the *nombrejos* with a problem, it would cost him. They'd grumble and complain and fart and scratch themselves, then tell him what he shouldn't have done, then demanded tribute, then maybe, if he was lucky, do something helpful. Mostly they'd just grumble and fart.

Wizards solved problems, they didn't create them.

Sitting on the bus bench in the failing light, Eleutherio turned a Jack In the Box napkin over against his thigh and made a list.

0 Spirit on the bus—Pretty McTeague, killed by this coach
1 Spirit asks for help
1 I say no
2 I get off bus
3 McTeague gets on bus, alive
5 Bus vanishes

It made no sense. But the numbers always made sense. So Eleutherio spent some time thinking about explanations. The trickster 2 was always a threat—had Pretty McTeague been twins?

Possible, he thought, but unlikely. Too simple, too pat. Besides, McTeague had said "I am" when he'd asked her who was calling her back. Not "my sister is," for example.

How could a dead woman live to call herself back?

Try the problem from the other end, he thought. How would he call a spirit back?

Well, Eleutherio thought, he wouldn't. But if he had to.

Calling back was a form of binding. Numbers could bind, in certain sequences and patterns. Some numbers were wicked powerful—perfect numbers, where all the divisors taken as a sum formed the number itself. 6, 28, and 496, for example. But he'd need a mighty big perfect number to wrestle a spirit back into the corporeal world. 2,658,455,991,569,831,744,654,692,615,953,842,176 sprang to mind. With sixty-one prime factors, the ninth perfect number would give him a goodly supply of anchor points.

Anchor to what, though? He could only call a spirit back if there was a vessel to call it back to. The newly dead—Eleutherio had once seen it done with a stroke victim, filled with the spirit of a slain girl. She hadn't lasted long, turned out crazier than a bridge troll trapped in the body of a fat, dead ironworker, but she'd been able to identify her killer to her mother and the *nombrejos*. Justice was served.

Sometimes people used big dogs, making them into servants and guardians. But that was mostly grassland wizard business. They cared about the land more than justice. Boundaries mattered to grassland wizards.

Hm, he'd call a spirit back into a bus. Which, in a sense, was what had already happened to Pretty McTeague. Her spirit never got off coach 4517.

Maybe what she meant by "called back" was different. Maybe she just meant someone was trying to get her *off* the bus.

He stared at his napkin.

Where had the bus gone?

Somewhere that Pretty McTeague didn't feel in danger of being called back from. The bus had gone wherever the dead went to hide.

It was time to take the story of his problem to the *nombrejos* and see what they could conjure from the arrays of the world. He hoped their interest would trump their irritation.

The number 17 bus—nicely, safely prime—that route number took Eleutherio back to the transit wizards' roost where he had lived since he could remember. He got off at the intersection of SE Holgate and 17th, walked to the vine-wrapped hole in the fence of the intermodal terminal, then slipped between the parked trucks and across the tracks to the ancient engine turntable and the round house beyond. Inside, the *nombrejos* had an ageing, elaborate space in the servicing pits beneath the tracks.

The long, dark bodies of three retired steam locomotives filled the track level space. Trains were good numbers, better than buses in some ways, but harder to use for transit magic because of their frozen routes. If the track patterns were felicitous, that was powerful good fortune, but most of the early surveyors had not been sufficiently aware of the significance of numbers.

Here the locomotives were the guardians of the *nombrejos*, their decades-long accumulation of numbers and time overlaying whatever might go on like armor against the forces of the night.

Eleutherio nodded at the two old men working on a Walschaert's gear. One hawked and spat—a folk warding against a wizard, useless as it was—but the other was more courteous.

Then he climbed down the ladder into the pit, dreading what might come next.

There were narrow benches or bunks all around, hammered together out of salvaged boards ripped down to odd-numbered dimensions. No two sections were the same size, to keep the numbers from aligning too well. Little rows of bottles, flowers, candy, spread in Fibonacci arcs away from the bunk pillars.

Offerings, from the grateful and the fearful.

Many of the *nombrejos* were sleeping yet. The powerful transit wizards did their business under the countless stars rather than the unitary sun. Only the young or the brave were sent out by day. A few were awake already, early risers or the day watch—Old Kevyn, Maria del Luz and Salorman, playing their endless, clicking game of dominoes.

Eleutherio stood quietly, hands folded, waiting to be noticed. These were the true wizards, the men and women he was trying to become.

Old Kevyn finally looked up. He was an Anglo, but his face and body were covered with tiny tattoos of numbers so that he was

mostly shadow-colored, the hue of ancient tattoos mottled by too much sun and cigarette smoke. Old Kevyn had a towel printed with a map of the London Underground wrapped around his waist, but Eleutherio could count the wizard's ribs. The numbers almost glowed where the thin skin laid over the pale bone.

"Boy's got a problem," he announced.

Maria del Luz let a domino slip between her fingers to clatter on the moldy, oil-stained concrete. "*El muchacho tiene un problema*..," she whispered through a toothless pucker of lips. Older than sin and twice as dark, Maria del Luz could call fire. That was a rare and mostly useless talent in a transit wizard—the numbers had little affinity for such physical manifestations, usually preferring to work through the flow of information, ideas, and the intangible. Her eyes glittered with something Eleutherio hoped was sympathy.

"P-p-p-problem," echoed Sailorman in his delayed babble. Pasty, pudgy and pale, nobody knew what Sailorman called himself, but his lips were always wet, his chin always glistening. He didn't have any water magic, Sailorman, but he could spot patterns in the tread wear on bus tires, or the sequence of brake lights on I-5, and was a fearsome fighter when the real trouble came calling.

"I have a problem."

Maria del Luz nodded. "*Maldecido el viento.*"

Eleutherio bowed his head. "Yes. I am sorry."

Sailorman hiccupped, then chewed out another word: "D-d-d-d-dead."

Eleutherio lifted his head as the other two *nombrejos* gave Sailorman a long glare. Sailorman rarely spoke on his own initiative, but that was an answer of sorts.

"Dead, yes," Eleutherio said. He told his story, quickly and succinctly as he had been taught, wishing he could literally speak in numbers like some of the oldest transit wizards did.

Old Kevyn chewed his lip, a domino flipping in his hand. 6, 1, 6, 1, 6, 1. Eleutherio's eye followed the pattern, the dots blurring into a cascade of prime 7 that trapped his attention.

"Is there a wrong been done here, boy?" Old Kevyn finally asked.

"I'm not sure." Eleutherio's voice was nearly a whisper. "I think so, but I cannot state it clearly, cannot write out the balancing numbers of the problem." He stopped, then blurted, "My bus is missing."

"Missing how?"

"She has taken it, hidden from herself, somewhere the dead go to be safe."

"Where are the dead safe?"

"I don't know, sir." Eleutherio felt frustration and fatigue creeping up on him in equal measure. "Their bodies are safe in the cemetery, the morgue in the urns of their ashes. But their spirits are safe once they have departed, moved on. Where would a spirit hide, and where would she take my bus?"

"*No puede conducir un autobús al paraíso*," grumbled Maria del Luz. All the *nombrejos* as well as the younger transit wizards were perfectly clear on Eleutherio's special relationship with coach 4517. But Maria was right—no one could drive a bus to Heaven. Not even Pretty McTeague.

Especially not Pretty McTeague.

Where would a dead woman feel safe?

Old Kevyn warned at the problem some more. "Your bus, it's a mighty powerful bus. Could it just be hidden from you? Cloaked in its own numbers?"

That thought made Eleutherio's gut tighten. Those were *his* numbers. Where could the bus be hidden, that he would not see it?

"Where, boy?" Old Kevyn asked, staring close. Maria del Luz's eyes glittered more brightly, while Sailorman blubbered his way toward some thought. Dark shapes stirred in the bunks around them, burping and yawning toward wakefulness, or propping themselves up to listen in.

"Into the undecidable," Eleutherio said slowly. All numbers had a secret flaw—Gödel's Theorem mandated unprovable propositions. In transit terms, there were places the buses could not go. Not for lack of roads, but because the routes couldn't bend around to reach. "The blind spot of my numbers." He gasped with relief. "Can you see it?"

"Oh .. probably," said Old Kevyn.

Maria's eyes rolled with fire now. "*Es su problema.*"

"S-s-s-s solve," Sailorman spat out, then appeared pleased.

Look where you cannot see," Old Kevyn added, not unkindly.

Worn out from his day, Eleutherio decided he would look first in dreams. Wherever 4517 had gone, it wasn't on the streets of Portland tonight.

The Dream Drive Bus

I roll down familiar paths, picking up energy the way a new tire picks up sparks on a winter morning. The stories slip into me by ones and threes, commingle and miscegenate, fertilize and cross-pollinate, so that each leaves a little richer, a little deeper, a little more powerful. I know my place, an extended, attenuated home inhabited in slices of time and motion, a thin house of my self and soul.

Some stories come to me fire-bright and glittering, some come age-dulled and dying. Some stories are so packed inward they cannot be told, not even to themselves, while some turn so outward they become threadworn and translucent. Some stand before and proclaim themselves, and some are ghostly as my own exhaust when I am in good tune.

But they are all mine. Everyone that passes my fare box, touches my steps, breathes on my windows, settles sweat-tired into my seat is mine. Even the invisible ones, the ancient ones, the lost angels and the searching shadows. They are mine, and I will bear them with me even to the scrapyard and beyond.

Eleutheno woke knowing that his bus had passed into story. Whatever that meant.

Tri-Met probably had different opinions, as did the City of Portland, but numbers were tricky. Number magic raged inside computers in a river of blue-green fire. The transit wizards didn't work with that—they worked with, of, and for the street—but Eleutheno could believe that a powerful bus like 4517 might be able to jigger the numbers in the dispatching computers.

He could even bring himself to think that Pretty McTeague's body had gotten on the bus her spirit rode, and they'd journeyed onward together to the next life. Despite what Maria del Luz had said, perhaps the bus had driven to paradise.

But what about the driver, the other passengers? There had been nine people on that bus when he got off, as the other Pretty McTeague had gotten on. Tri-Met might be tricked into not noticing a missing bus, but Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757—all three digits prime, as was the local number itself—certainly would notice a missing union brother. Though people routinely fooled themselves in a thousand ways, it was much harder to use the numbers to rewrite people's memories than it was to rewrite electronic records.

And Pretty McTeague's spirit had asked him for help, asked not to be called back. This was not a peaceful transition, not with nine other bodies and souls and the entire corporeal mass of a city bus.

The bus might have passed into story, but it hadn't gone to heaven.

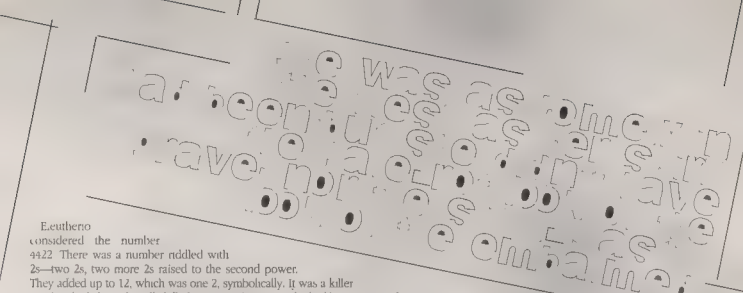
Eleutherio slid out of his hard-board bunk and stumbled out past the morning watch, the almost-snoring Mersenne triplets. He climbed through the now-empty round house and into the glare of morning. It was time to look where he could not see, in the heart of story.

The number 17 took him back downtown. It was coach 4080, a curious number in its own right, but he was trying to find the place not to look. Hunting for ideas, Eleutherio tried the main branch of the Multnomah County Public Library. There were a million stories there, all dead and frozen to their pages, but numbers abounded there too—stuck to book spines, on shelf ends, running in endless repetition at the corners of the printed pages.

He ghosted the vast central stairwell a while, feeling foolish and unfocused. Certainly no one had tucked a missing Tri-Met bus in the upstairs book stacks of the library. 4517 was still missing from his sight.

Why couldn't he see it?

Because it wasn't there.



Eleutherio
considered the number
4422 There was a number riddled with
2s—two 2s, two more 2s raised to the second power.
They added up to 12, which was one 2, symbolically. It was a killer
number, had almost literally killed Pretty McTeague And it had been
the number of his bus

4517 had gone into Pretty McTeague's story, drawn there by her
body walking like a dream in broad daylight seeking her spirit 4517
had become 4422

Everyone had gone home last night. They just hadn t ridden 4517
They'd ridden 4422

Eleutherio almost whooped for joy He raced down the stairs, burst
out the doors of the library onto SW 10th Avenue and slammed into
Pretty McTeague in her denim hip huggers and striped halter top.

"Hey, Lefty," she said, folding him in as if for a hug

What…?"

Play nice," she whispered in his ear, cramming his face into her
breasts "I'm sorry, hon."

Sorry for what?" His voice was muffled by her chest

"Not coming back for you sooner " She pulled him to one side, her
hand pinched tight on his upper arm. They started walking south,
Pretty McTeague dragging him along

"Coming back for me?" Eleutherio felt stupid. Wizards were never
supposed to be *behind* the story.

"Who's your momma, little wizard boy?"

"I …"

"You was born on a bus, I died under a bus I drank too much
between times, but I was there at both ends Traded my life for yours,
finally . . son."

At Taylor she tugged him onto an idling Tri Met bus

4422, Eleutherio realized

His bus. Always his bus. Not because they'd changed the number.
Because Pretty—his mother—had died of this bus, and the power of
her spirit flowed to him

She hadn't been keeping his power from him on the bus these last
years She'd been keeping it *for* him.

Until now "What next?" he asked.

Pretty sat herself in the driver's seat, shut the door, and buckled
up "I'm back," she said simply, then gave him a tight smile. "Your
power is mine I never was no wizard before, but I got to say, I
already see the world differently "

She was as homely in the flesh as her spirit had been, but she
didn't have the pale-rot look of the grave, nor the slick-plastic look
of the embalmed That body hadn't been in the ground these past
years, he realized

"You're not Pretty McTeague," he said slowly

"Right, kid. And you're the ghost of Elvis "

"No You're not You're someone else, glamored to look like her
To fool the spirit on this bus "

Her knuckles were anger-red where she clutched the bus s big
wheel "I'm back, damn it." She looked startled at her own words

This was wrong Completely wrong. Eleutherio reached out for the
numbers around him. The odometer on the dashboard, the second
odometer
on the right rear wheel
hub, the license plate, the speedometer,
the incidental numbers printed on the fare box and in the
telephone numbers of the bus signage He thought of his 61 divisor per
fect number, rolled 2,658,455,991,569,831,744,654,692,615,953,842,176
around in his head. He cloaked himself in numbers, clothed himself in
numbers, anchored their power points and let them stream around him

Driving, Pretty McTeague couldn't fight him off. "I'm your mother,
kid," she shouted, though the air inside the bus wavered and crackled

They crossed NW 13th Avenue—another prime—then the viaduct
over I-405. Air under the bus, cross traffic, a number with a zero at
its heart, void and amoral Eleutherio swung his trailing stream of
numbers and wrapped them around his mother.

"Go on," he shouted in her ear. "Pass on. You are done here
Rest "

He reached for her spirit, into the body which was dissolving into
a nest of 2s She fought, Pretty McTeague fought him hard, but over
the emptiness of the Interstate bridge, away from the grounding
earth, her spirit was weakened.

Shrieking, she fled.

Her body collapsed into a tangle of rats and pigeons and weather
twine and shopping bags and old shoes, which exploded all over the
bus. 4422 ground to a halt just at the light at 14th Avenue as the pan-
icked animals fled

Gathering the quivering remains of his powers, Eleutherio opened
the door and stepped to the curb. None of his spirit remained behind
this time

He walked a while, away from the sirens and the horns honking
at the stalled bus, then eventually sat down and made another list.
This time he wrote on the back of a used Starbucks napkin

0. I was born on a bus
1. Pretty McTeague died under a bus
1. She was my mother
2 She stayed to watch over me
3 Someone called her back and set her against me
5 Wizards

He looked up to see Old Kevyn standing in front of him, wearing
an enormous wool coat and a ragged sombrero, though it was
already close to eighty degrees The *nombrero* leaned on a Fred
Meyer shopping cart filled with old combat boots. Lots of numbers
in any well-worn laced shoe, Eleutherio knew, but the multiple eye-
lets of a combat boot increased that even more

That cart was like a battery of number power And because it was
wheeled, it was accessible to a transit wizard

"Glad you're still with us, kid," Old Kevyn said

Continued on page 90

Many children dream of running away to join the circus. Others have much grander plans.

Circus Circus

by Eric M. Witchey
Illustration by Val Rochon

[illegible] have many multi-colored big tops with [illegible] support poles and three rings in the [illegible] to [illegible] them, and six smaller tents with [illegible] and [illegible]. Bottle Throw, the Wheel of Fortune, especially the Fat Lady and Lyssa—because she [illegible] the circus went [illegible] that made the circus grow.

The circus started many [illegible] when [illegible] and one day it came across an old circus that [illegible] on as a development circus gave up the big tops. They became a [illegible] circus in a county [illegible] of Arizona. [illegible] a [illegible] and [illegible] ers and talk to children.

[illegible] children.

[illegible] its people to call to the children and bring them in [illegible] and wade to spend their pesos and to [illegible]

"I want to be a circus. I want to have tents and acrobats and animals, and I want the children from all the villages to love me."

The circus did not

ropes

sure morning would bring ill omens.

Stu
stri
reb
te
to the floor, and sobbed.

breath,

eyes, then spoke. "He's dea
he boy?
"Yes."

chores while it listened to Senora Bruja.
"How?" the circus asked.

"So they killed him? For that?"

and laughed from now on."
"And?"

his head. He died."
The sobs came to her again.

that he was dead."
"We killed him," Senora Bruja said.

"We told him he could be a circus."
"Yes," the circus said.

came and gathered in her tent.

for the tent.

storm. "The tent will not hold."

the poles are strong,"
The circus said. "Maria, tell them."

fight.

for all its people.

to come.

O
to
top
Wh
T
to the gi

in the face of death.

a free show.

front-row ticket.

she washed her son.

center ring.

the grave.

"All in silence."

their laps.
The crowd was silent.
The performers were silent.
The tent flaps and ropes were silent.

circus.
The boy's mother nodded.

to one side.

confused, but clearly unrepentant.

top hat.

filled the space inside the tent.

clowns moved into the center ring.
People murmured in the darkness

them without light.

formed in the darkness.

village sighed their relief.

The bullies fidgeted and looked about.

, she said, "to

He was laughing at us," the boy sai

so hard that he died.

deserved to die." The boy spat

of Señora Bruja.

howl that the men became afraid and sat back down.

Manolo's shroud.

The tiny circus laughed, and the laugh was the laugh of Manolo.

first day of his new life.
The tent flaps closed again.

she said, "Come down."

ng he was sorry.
The circus laughed so all could hear.

The false sorrow of the boy ended.

People gasped. A woman screamed.
Señora Bruja freed the boy.

nd died.
Silence filled the tent.

down," she said.

headed for the aisle and the tent flaps.

The bear lifted its lip and growled.

"Come down," Señora Bruja said.

Most did not.
"That's just stupid," the boy said.

more.

The boy spit on the shroud.
Señora Bruja nodded.
The clowns grasped the boy's arms.

ist-thick ropes and tie them off.

ng to them.

oo spit on the grave of Manolo.

but only foolish noise[illegible]e from his lips.

The little girl laughed again.

Senora Bruja turned to the people[illegible]e held up her top hat. The [illegible]ed three times. She thanked them for coming to the performance, and she bade them go, she bade them remember Manolo, and she bade them be kind to one another in his memory.

The tent flaps opened.

Silent, somber people filed away from the circus and back to the village.

Finally, only the circus[illegible]e[illegible]ve remained.

Good, Senora Bruja said. "Come in."

The night stepped into the [illegible]

"Together, we will bury your son," Bruja said. Together, they knelt. All the people of the circus knelt with them. All took up handfuls of dirt and worked to bury the boy.

"I had wished to be a circus[illegible]

When the grave had been filled, Senora Bruja said, "Three days, and it stays here. Then you will stay with us."

"Burro", Manolo's mother asked.

[illegible]

Senora Bruja nodded.

"Yes, Senora Bruja said. "Your burro will stay with the performing[illegible]

"It's true, then?" the mother said. "Manolo told me[illegible]e could speak to the spirit of the [illegible]es?"

"The spirit of the circus can[illegible]nd speak to me if it chooses, and it has asked me to do one more thing before we rest." She crossed the mound of the grave, and she[illegible]Manolo's centavos, in a row on the mound of the grave. Then she drew a circle around the coins.

Each morning, Senora Bruja and the mother of Manolo returned to the grave in the big top. On the third morning, the mother gasped. There, where the coins had been was a tiny big top[illegible]e[illegible]and striped in gay[illegible]and white. Pennants of red, and white[illegible]e[illegible]at the points of the small[illegible]e[illegible]hissed and snapped[illegible]ny[illegible]

The tiny circus laughed. And the laugh was the laugh of Manolo.

Senora Bruja handed Manolo's mother a book of arcane knowledge, a fortune teller's book. "Now, Senora Bruja said, "We smoke and move on. For a time, you will go with us. In a few years, you will go North—you and the circus."

"My son," she said.

"No. He is a circus now. He will grow. He will spread smiles and laughter, and you will be his fortune-teller."

Manolo's mother nodded solemnly.

[illegible]ed, and all the people in it [illegible]nodded and went about the work [illegible]ating the smiles and laughter that save [illegible]

spare change

Continued from page 45

The waiter arrived, a bottle of wine in his hand. "Compliments of the management," he said.

"Of course," said Smith, smiling as he looked at the bottle. Then he frowned. "What's this?"

"Chateau Haut-Brion," the waiter said with a slight bow. "The most expensive in the house."

Smith pointed at the label. "This is a '98."

The waiter was perplexed. "Yes."

"This is swill! How dare you!"

The waiter reacted as though there was a lion at his throat. "I assure you—"

"Look, you little shit, you take this bottle of piss back and get me something from a decent year. And tell your boss that if he can't do better, he'll be back flipping hamburgers at McDonald's where he started."

The waiter had turned white. "Yes sir," the waiter said, backing away and bowing.

Roger watched the scene silently, playing with the silverware. "Do you have many friends, Mr. Smith?"

Smith shrugged. "My colleagues."

"Yes, but are they your *friends*? Can you trust them?"

"Of course."

"Are you *sure*?"

"What's this all about?"

Now it was Roger's turn to smile. "If there's one thing I've learned, it's that you guys don't play fair. You change the rules in the middle of the game, just to see how I'll jump."

"That's our specialty."

"What makes you think they aren't changing things right now? Maybe you *are* the next 'it' in this little game of tag."

Smith shook his head. "I'm one of Them. They wouldn't turn on me."

Roger leaned forward. "Wouldn't they? I think that you just might rub people the wrong way. A little too smug. A little too smart. A little too nasty. People don't like that. Not even among Them. And I bet you've made a few enemies who'd like to see you take a fall."

Smith began to smooth his red silk tie as though it was a nervous animal. "It's not going to happen, I'm afraid. You'll just have to find—" Roger began to sneeze.

It was a violent fit, one after another. The diners were all staring when, with one last explosive "achoo," a computer chip fell out his nose and landed on the white tablecloth.

Smith stared at it with a delightful look of horror.

Roger rose. "Enjoy your meal, Mr. Smith." He stood up and tossed a couple of coins on the tablecloth.

"What's this?" Smith asked. The uncertainty in his voice was very satisfying.

"Spare change," said Roger. "Better get used to it." ❧

the devil

Continued from page 59

Comstock's eyes and dripped down her nose. "But you know how moody cooking turkey gets me."

Mr. Comstock folded his wife into his arms. "I think you'd better leave, Mr. Lewis."

Byron agreed. He tugged his shoes on, balancing on one foot then the other, as he shoved his recorder into his pocket. But before he could make good his escape, Mrs. Comstock pulled away from her husband.

"Wait, Mr. Lewis." She darted away and returned a moment later with a Pyrex pie dish topped with golden brown crumbles. "It's Dutch apple, Mr. Bane's favorite." She shoved it at Byron. "And I'll start on a batch of snickerdoodles, just in case."

A moment later, Byron found himself standing on the Comstocks' porch, Mrs. Comstock's apple pie in hand. Nearby, a window shattered, and shouts rang in the once-quiet street. Sirens erupted in the distance; a little girl sat crying on the front steps of the house next door and the neighborhood dogs had joined together in a chorus of howls. Byron stumbled to his car. It wasn't until he'd slid behind the wheel that he realized someone had broken in and stolen his stereo, leaving a straggle of wires jutting from the dashboard.

Damn it!

Done." The voice was a whisper of ice.

Byron spun around. A shadowy figure sat in his backseat. He couldn't make out any features; it roiled and shifted, a seething darkness that made his stomach clench and bile rise in his throat. Fiery eyes glared at him both compelling and repulsive, the intensity of them as heavy as a fist around his heart.

Byron shuddered, feeling the drip of cold sweat beneath his arms. It was the hardest thing he had ever done, lifting the pie over the front seat and setting it down beside the apparition.

"—it's Dutch apple, s-sir, Mr. Bane," he stuttered.

Byron felt the terrible pressure of the creature's gaze lift. The pandemonium of dogs stalled, and the very air seemed to hold its breath.

The darkness coalesced on the pie, engulfing it. A heartbeat later, it spilled out again, leaving behind the empty dish and a morsel of crust. The Comstocks' cat-dog-weasel, materialized out of the shapeless gloom, licking its whiskers. It fixed Byron with its faintly glowing eyes.

Mrs. Comstock's baking a batch of snickerdoodles," Byron croaked.

Mr. Bane bounded out of the car, glass and metal parting like water before him. He landed on the lawn and waddled up the walk. The door opened to admit him, and the last Byron Lewis saw of the Devil was the fat tip of his tail as he disappeared into the Comstock home. ❧

BY ARI BERK

MAGICAL

THE HOUSE OF FROUD,

Wendy and Brian, that is, is filled with magical beings that inspire creative collaboration. They don't do housework, though.

MENAGERIE

"A piece will take on A PERSONALITY AND A PRESENCE. PAPER AND PENCIL AND MATERIALS of its

WF: Coming from Detroit, this house is older than anything I could possibly have grown up with but I feel more comfortable here than anywhere else. Of course it does have all of the problems that very old houses tend to suffer from such as drafts, loose floorboards, a spring that suddenly appears in the hallway every once in a while, and ceiling beams low enough to knock out our taller guests. It was obviously made at a time when most people were our height! I love the "groundedness" of the house itself. It nestles into the hillside on one side while the other side looks out onto trees that have grown up into a small forest since we planted them over twenty years ago.

AB: Those who've seen it know your house is a kind of magical menagerie, creatures peering from every corner, faerie paintings on every wall. What's it like living with all your art, all that magic, around you?

WF: I'm tempted to say that we don't notice it anymore because we live with it every day, but actually I think it truly influences the way we look at everything around us. Once we've created a piece whether it is a painting, a drawing, or a figure, it takes on a quality and life of its own. A presence, if you like.

BF: Once these things we make are in the world they demand

acknowledgment and by acknowledging them we tune our senses in a way that lets us see magic in other objects, other situations around us every day

WF: We tend to see things in a magical way as well as a mundane way most of the time

AB: What was it like delving back into older works for your new books? What was the experience of looking at older works next to newer ones? How do you think your work has changed or developed over the years? Are there any special pieces of yours that mark major transitions for you as artists?

WF: I'm not sure if I could actually point to any one piece and say, "Yes, that is a landmark figure." I think that's because I've been working with the imagery that I use since I started making dolls at around five years old. I've always made mythological creatures and angels and faeries. My work seems—at least to me—to be a steady progression. My skill has developed and now I find it easier to realize my ideas in terms of ability.

If I had to choose one piece that marks a transition in my work I think it would have to be "The Kiss." I [illegible] the [illegible] Museum of Art's Norman Lindsay and it marks a maturity in my style that, although evident in earlier pieces, became more consistent with this piece. It was sculpted for an exhibition at the CFM Gallery in New York called "The Doll As Art." It showcased a group of doll artists and truly revealed all our work as the art that it is, proving that the pieces were not "just dolls" as people often considered them.

BF: Back in the 1970s I did a painting that appeared on the cover of the book *Once Upon a Time*. This was a collection of work from British artists working in the fantasy genre. When I finished this painting, I recall thinking that it was the best work I'd ever done. Since then, of course, my art has taken many turns, each time exploring a new aspect of my subject.

AB: What is the process like when you work from each other's pieces of art? You've said [Wendy] you'll sometimes work from one of Brian's drawings. Does he ever work back from one of your sculptures?

WF: When Brian gives me a design to work from, now that I'm not actually working for him, I have to be able to respond to and empathize with the creature he has designed before I can agree to try sculpting it. Having said that, I usually love anything he suggests I make, but every once in a while I find that I just can't respond to a drawing and then we have a bit of an argument and storm off to our studios. We do always come out again to negotiate and compromise until we have something we can both work with. Sometimes

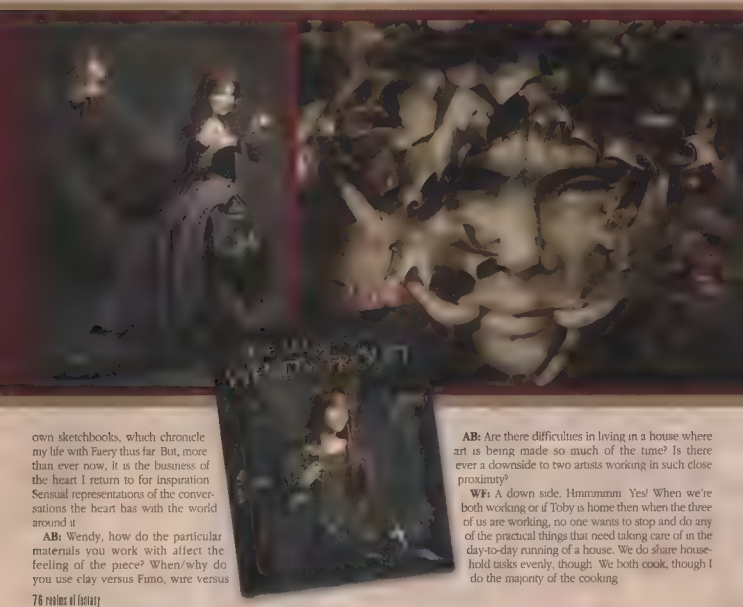
Brian will respond so strongly to a figure I've made that he'll decide to use it to work from as well. He also has a real connection to the figure of Gargle from the book *Goblins!* Gargle lives in Brian's studio where Brian can keep an eye on him since he causes havoc every time he's let out into the rest of the house. He is an example of a creature that started as a drawing and then truly came to life as a three-dimensional figure and in doing so became much more than either of us intended in the first place.

BF: This does happen when we collaborate every so often. A piece will take on a personality and a presence that goes beyond the mere paper and pencil and materials of its physical composition. When this happens, it's rather like an artistic parenthood.

AB: What motifs and sources of inspiration do you repeatedly return to? Why?

WF: I suppose I repeatedly return to Greek mythology, angels fallen and otherwise, Pre-Raphaelite women, faery stories and legends, and Brian's sketchbooks. I am inspired by many things. A beautiful piece of fabric, an autumn leaf, a flower, the way a cobweb looks in the light. Colors, sounds, even smells can be inspiring. I'm surrounded by inspiration—there just isn't enough time to apply everything that inspires me.

BF: Rackham, of course, was an enormous influence on my work. I'd also include J.W. Waterhouse and old Flemish and Northern Masters—all those wimples and cowls! I also frequently go back to my own sketchbooks, which chronicle my life with Faery thus far. But, more than ever now, it is the business of the heart I return to for inspiration. Sensual representations of the conversations the heart has with the world around it.



AB: Wendy, how do the particular materials you work with affect the feeling of the piece? When/why do you use clay versus Fimo, wire versus wood? Do such decisions speak to the ritual nature of making your art? How so?

WF: I use Fimo because of all of the polymer clays I have tried Fimo is the one I find most responsive to my personal sculpting style. It has a waxy quality and it's not as soft as most other polymer clays. It feels more like a natural substance to me. For large pieces I would always prefer to use wet clay—terra cotta, etc.—because it's a joy to work with, but then I'd have to go through the process of making molds and casting in resin to get the qualities that I especially like. More difficult and time consuming. I like to work fast and I hate having to stop and wait for a long process to take place.

Ritual. Now that's difficult. I think that an artist's ritual, whatever it may be, is quite private and probably meaningless to anyone else. Do I need to do things in a certain order, set tools out in a certain way, clear a space around me, play certain music? Perhaps, but then I expect everyone has those kinds of rituals. As for ritual in making an object? That would be telling.

AB: But do you ever make a piece with a specific intention, for someone, for a particular reason? Isn't that a kind of ritual?

WF: While I always put healing energy into all my pieces, when I make a piece for someone in particular, I will always direct the healing energy toward them, making it specifically for them. But as to what happens when or if the piece is ever given to someone else? I really don't know.

AB: Are there difficulties in living in a house where art is being made so much of the time? Is there ever a downside to two artists working in such close proximity?

WF: A down side. Hmmmmm. Yes! When we're both working or if Toby is home then when the three of us are working, no one wants to stop and do any of the practical things that need taking care of in the day-to-day running of a house. We do share household tasks evenly, though. We both cook, though I do the majority of the cooking.

BF: I do most of the dishes. My life's true calling.

WF: I just wish they were clean when he got through with them. We work it out, but most people would be horrified by the cobwebs and just stuff all over the house. We hate housework. We need full time servants. It's never going to happen!

AB: The house hobs don't do the dusting for you?

WF: No! I *wish* they did. They do seem to be more helpful if we keep the house tidy, though. They don't seem to like it very much when we let it get really messy. Then they do things like make lightbulbs blow, dishes break, and generally create even more chaos. I just thought of something—maybe it's the messiness that brings out the goblins. Maybe that's when they think they can get away with creating even more mess and we just walk right into it by making mess in the first place. Poor house hobs. It's probably not their fault at all. We're to sell the more tidy.

AB: If you couldn't sculpt, draw, what would you do?

WF: I would write. If I was younger and wanted to live a really different sort of life I'd be an archaeologist or a psychologist, but if I had to stop sculpting now? I'd concentrate on writing, which is something I truly enjoy.

BF: I would focus more on photography.

AB: Wendy, in your book *The Art of Wendy Froud*, Brian did do all the photography. Could you describe that process? Does the presentation of the piece affect the feeling of the sculpture? Do you see this as another kind of artistic collaboration?

WF: This is very much a major kind of artistic collaboration. It is one thing to see a piece in person, but when the majority of people will be experiencing my work on the printed page it needs a special eye to photograph it so that the feeling of the piece comes across sensitively and expressively. John Lawrence Jones was the photographer for all three of the "Old Oak Wood" books and his photographs were amazing and captured and actually created the spirit of the books perfectly.

For this book, since it is a collection of pieces alone and not in a situation, we needed a consistency of style and feeling that would help to pull the book together as a whole while showing each piece to the best advantage. Brian decided to go for a very European look. He had in mind old theaters in Prague perhaps, or at least the parallel, magical Prague that exists in another reality. Looking at the book is rather like looking at the pieces themselves in our home. You can view them—and perhaps then the world outside the book, outside the theater—with a more "magical" eye. ❧

***The Art of Wendy Froud* and *The Secret Sketchbooks of Brian Froud* are published by Imaginosis and are available at http://www.goblinmarket.net/store.**

Desperate times make for desperate gambles, and desperate people forget that the game is always stacked against them.

IN THE THICKET WITH WOLVES

By Josh Rountree
Illustration by Patrick Arrasmith

Maggie never considered herself desperate enough to barter with the thicket wolves. But that was before the word *complications* took on a whole new meaning in her life. Before the doctor explained that her child was going to be *different*. Maggie hadn't been out of high school that long, she remembered how *different* kids were treated. And it wouldn't stop there. Even well-meaning folks couldn't help but sneak a quick look in the supermarket or whisper something in their friend's ear about "that poor thing." She'd done it herself. And they'd tell their kids to hush, to quit pointing. He's not bad, just *different*.

"Down's syndrome is a disorder that includes a combination of birth defects." The doctor's voice was without inflection, a practiced tone that made him sound like he was reading from a medical journal. "The child will experience some degree of mental retardation. Altered facial features. Heart defects. Increased chance for infections. Problems with vision and hearing. The severity of these conditions varies, but he'll most likely live well into adulthood."

The doctor continued speaking, but Maggie tuned him out. It didn't matter what he was saying, it all translated into the same thing. Her baby would never have a normal life. They'd already told her it was going to be a boy, and she'd chosen a name: Bailey—her Maw Maw's maiden name. A gift to the only person in her family who hadn't disowned her. At nights, Maggie would lie in bed and let Bailey's future play out in her mind. Bailey chasing a soccer ball around a muddy field, stealing it from a bigger kid and scoring the winning goal. Building balsawood airplanes with a studied expression on his face, like her brother Alan before he discovered girls were more fun than model airplanes, graduating valedictorian, bringing home a skinny redheaded girl that kind of reminded Maggie of herself, the first step toward engagement, marriage, children, happiness.

And now none of it would happen.

The doctor droned on. Maggie's heart rate quickened and a roaring sound filled her head like waves crashing against the inside of her skull. Somewhere in the middle of the doctor's monologue, the word *abortion* fell from his tongue like a rotten bit of meat that he hadn't wanted to continue chewing. Maggie seized on the possibility.

It would be best for Bailey, wouldn't it? Why condemn him to a life without *life*? And Maggie couldn't lie to herself; it would be better for *her*. It's not like a twenty-year-old who works the counter at the Dairy Queen was in a position to raise a special needs child. She'd have to

quit, probably have to live off the state. Just like everyone said would happen when she told them she was pregnant. Her mind conjured a nightmare image of herself, drooling baby under one arm, counting out pennies and food stamps in the supermarket line while her mother waited behind her, screaming, "Told you what happens to little sluts who spread their legs for greasy boys who change tires for a living? Can't believe you gave that *thing* a family name."

Then she thought about those private home movies of Bailey that played in her head, and knew that she wouldn't be able to erase that little boy from the film. Even if it *was* for the best.

"You don't have to decide today," the doctor said, sliding the tissue box across the surface of his desk. "But you'll need to choose a course of action soon."

Maggie pulled a tissue from the box and dabbed her eyes. "I'm gonna keep him."

The doctor nodded; an empty gesture that neither supported nor condemned her decision. He laced his fingers together, like her father always had before delivering one of his lectures about the kind of girl she was supposed to be. Maggie heard everything she needed to, and didn't care to sit in the doctor's office for another second of his college-bought wisdom.

Maggie slid back her chair and stood. "Thanks for your help," she said, although she couldn't think of a single thing he'd done to help.

"The hospital has people you can talk to about this."

"I'm fine. Really. I'm gonna have the baby." Maggie rushed for the door, desperate to leave. She made it all the way to the parking lot before vomiting.

Maggie didn't make a conscious decision to seek out the wolves, but some part of her knew what she was doing when she drove past the Dairy Queen and kept going until Silsbee was nothing but a blinking traffic light in the rearview mirror.

Towering pine trees rose around her car like two halves of a parted ocean. It always surprised her how quickly civilization gave way to the strangling forests of East Texas. The region was called The Big Thicket, and it was the kind of place that unwary hikers could wander in to and never make it out of. An endless array of pine and cypress carved up by slinky, snake-infested rivers and blackwater swampland, alive with raccoons, toads, the occasional alligator.

And, of course, wolves.

Most of the people she'd heard tell stories about the thicket wolves were backwoods sorts, unafraid to stretch the truth if their own acclaim might grow in the telling. But her Maw Maw believed in them too, and no force under Heaven could compel that woman to lie. Maggie knew that's who she was headed to see; where else did she have to go?

Seven miles out from Silsbee, Maggie slowed her second-hand Pontiac and turned onto a rocky dirt road barely visible from the highway. She drove up to a locked cattle gate, stopped the car and drew back the rusted length of chain that held the gate closed. From there it was a short jaunt up Maw Maw's muddy driveway.

Her home was a two-bedroom cabin, nothing but whitewashed wood beneath a clapboard roof. The screen door swung open and Maw Maw stepped out onto the porch. She had the thin body of a woman raised on moderation. Her blouse was plain white cotton, and the tail hung out over a pair of faded jeans.

"Get over here, girl," she said, welcoming Maggie with a smile and wide-open arms. "Didn't expect to see you this weekend. You're working, ain't you?"

Maggie crossed to the porch and accepted her grandmother's hug. What little misery she'd managed to hold at bay came loose in a flood of tears, and she buried her head in Maw Maw's shoulder. The old woman was a rock, absorbing Maggie's pain in silence until her sobs quieted.

"C'mon, honey," she said. "Let's go inside and have a talk."

Held in the cool shadows of Maw Maw's house, Maggie could close her eyes and pretend she was a child again, back in the days when she and her parents still lived here. Daddy was gone most of the time to work the oil rigs out of Beaumont; Maggie and her mother would help Maw Maw bottle her elixirs to be sold at one of the regional flea markets or farmers' trade days. The comfortable cabin smelled of pinecones and jasmine, dandelions and honeycombs, all the earthy ingredients Maw Maw used to ply her trade. Maggie remembered the taste of fresh peaches in summer, and the sound of laughter.

Now the scents remained, but the room was clogged with an uncomfortable silence. Maggie loved her grandmother's home, but it hadn't been the same since her mother had found religion and moved the family into town. Angry voices still haunted the cabin. Maggie's mother, demanding that Maw Maw stop selling her devil potions, calling her a sinner, a witch. It was nonsense, but her mother's new way of life had no place for herbal medicines and spiritual healing. Maggie still hated her mother for moving them away.

"So what's your plan?" Maw Maw refilled Maggie's glass with steaming tea, a homemade mixture that was slowly taking the edge off her tension. She took a seat opposite Maggie at the kitchen table and poured another cup for herself.

"I don't know. I haven't had a chance to think much about it yet."

"Well, you know you and the baby are always welcome here. Be glad to have you."

"I know. I appreciate that."

"Guess you still haven't heard from Glen?"

Maggie shook her head. And she wouldn't be hearing from Glen; she was sure of that. He'd already had one foot out the door when the home pregnancy test came back positive, and the official stamp of approval from Dr. Garza made up his mind. He'd always talked about moving to Florida to work on his uncle's orange plantation. Maggie figured that's where he went, but she wasn't about to go looking for him. Glen was a mistake she didn't intend to make twice.

"Well, the baby's condition won't make life any easier, but you're a strong young woman. Don't always make the best choices, but I've never seen one your age that did."

"I'm not sure I'm up to it."

"Well, you better *get* sure. Ain't got much choice."

"Well, I do. Sorta."

Maw Maw's face tightened. "I guess you're right. But I suggest you think on it a while. And if you decide to do it, at least come to me for one of my powders. I can't stand the thought of some doctor doing it his way. That's barbaric."

"Maw Maw? That's not what I'm talking about. I'm keeping Bailey."

Some of the well-being flowed back into Maw Maw's features. "I think that's a good decision."

"What I'm talking about is fixing what's wrong with him."

"Honey, none of my medicines will help. And you said the doctor can't do nothing."

MAGGIE CRIED, FEELING LIKE AN IDIOT DRESSED IN HER DAIRY QUEEN OUTFIT, PINNING ALL HER HOPES ON SOME RIDICULOUS FOLK LEGEND.

"I'm not talking about the doctor. I'm talking about the thicket wolves."

Maw Maw sat her teacup on the table and leaned forward. Maggie wasn't sure how her grandmother would react, but she hadn't expected the woman's cold stare or the naked disappointment in her voice. "I thought you were smarter than that."

"What else am I supposed to do?"

"You're supposed to love that baby for what it is."

"I don't know if I can, Jesus God, I just want it to be normal." Maggie cried, feeling like an idiot dressed in her Dairy Queen outfit, pinning all her hopes on some ridiculous folk legend. Why did she even think calling on the wolves would work? Maw Maw took her hand, and Maggie cried harder when she realized that the most important person in her life wasn't ready to abandon her yet.

"Don't matter if that baby has two heads. When you see him with a mother's eyes, he'll be the most wonderful thing in the world."

Maggie shook her head, drying her eyes on her shirtsleeve. "You don't know that. I can't have a baby like this, Maw Maw."

"Well, you ain't going to them wolves! Damn it, girl, ain't you paid attention your whole life? You've seen what happens to folks who ask the wolves for favors."

"Yes I have. They get what they ask for. Johnny Dale Adams got a brand new bass boat one time."

"Uh huh. And Johnny Dale caught cancer and died a year later. Then Norma, then little Dodie. The whole family."

"How do you know that has anything to do with the wolves?"

"How do you know it don't?" Maw Maw squeezed Maggie's hand tighter, and tears welled in her eyes. "You think this is some silly wishing game that's gonna solve all your problems. Well, it ain't. The wolves are real, and they'll give you what you want. But there's a price. Sometimes it ain't much, but sometimes it's your whole life. Either way you ain't gonna want to pay it."

"I don't think—"

"Hush! Listen to me now. My grandma used to always have a way with the earth. Medicines. Powders. And I wanted to be just like her. Problem was, mine didn't always work that well."

"What do you mean? They work great."

"They do now. Thanks to the wolves. Some folks complained that my medicines weren't working like I promised, and I couldn't figure out what I was doing wrong with the mixtures. I swore I'd never go to them wolves, but I got desperate and I did anyway. Now I'm better at this than my grandma ever was. But them wolves had the last laugh."

"What did they do?" Maggie saw a new woman sitting across the table from her. Not the wise, self-sufficient woman who'd endured the death of her young husband and raised three children off the land, but a frightened old woman who'd made mistakes and would likely do so again. Maw Maw was human, and that scared Maggie to death.

"They gave your mama religion. A couple of weeks after I called the wolves, this preacher knocked on the door and that was the end of that. She never took to anything like she did that Bible."

"You think it was the wolves that sent that preacher?"

"Yes I do. Not even sure if he was a preacher. Might have been the devil himself, but it all washes out the same either way. I got my wish and I lost everything I loved. Your mama moved you to town and she ain't visited since."

"But how do you know that was the wolves' fault?"

"I know! You may be old enough to get knocked up, but you're not old enough to know everything that goes on in the world. You want to ruin you life, then go right ahead. But don't act like I'm some crazy old woman looking to blame something else for her problems."

Maggie yanked her hands from Maw Maw's grip, and drew back from the table. Maw Maw had never been so harsh with her, and she lashed out. "I'm not the idiot you think I am, and I have enough people in this world judging me. I don't need another."

"I hope you didn't come here for my approval, 'cause you're not getting it."

"I don't want your approval," Maggie lied. "Just tell me how to call the wolves and I'll leave you alone. I'm not going to let my baby get kicked around by the world. I'm going to the wolves one way or another. You can help me or I can figure it out myself, but it's going to happen."

Maw Maw stood and started cleaning the dishes, snatching Maggie's half-full cup of tea away before she could take another drink. "Damned if you aren't as willful as I was at your age."

"I understand there's a price. But it'll be worth it for Bailey to have a normal life."

"I'm not going to try and force you to see my side of this. That's your mama's way. You do what you're going to do."

"So you'll tell me how?"

Maw Maw nodded. "If you're set on doing this, you at least need to do it the right way. You don't respect the ritual, and them wolves won't bother with granting wishes. They'll just kill you."

Maggie followed a whispering creek into the thicket. Pine needles pricked her bare feet, while underbrush and fallen maple leaves swished against her ankles. If she followed the creek far enough it would feed into the Neches River. Follow the Neches to the Gulf of Mexico and she'd come to the oil rigs she'd always hated for stealing her Daddy away. But she didn't plan on going that far. Just a mile or so from Maw Maw's house and she'd be at the glade her grandmother had described.

She'd traded in her Dairy Queen outfit for one of Maw Maw's sundresses, a knee-length covering of thin green cotton with lace straps. She hadn't wanted to change clothes, and she definitely hadn't wanted to leave her shoes behind. But Maw Maw insisted that calling the wolves demanded some degree of ritual, so Maggie had complied.

Now she was thankful she had. The dress fell just below her knees and caught the scant few breaths of cool air the night exhaled. Summer nights in East Texas never really cooled off, but the sticky heat of the day became a touch more manageable. The breeze tickled her shoulders, found its way into the dress' folds and covered her in chilly kisses. The delightful touch reminded her momentarily of Glen, but she banished the thought. The good memories of that man weren't worth remembering.

Once Maggie decided to go through with it, she didn't want to wait. Maw Maw said the wolves only came out at night. Maggie figured if she didn't just get it over with, her grandmother might find a way to talk her out of it. And if that happened, Bailey would never have the life she wanted for him.

Maggie picked her way though the trees, kept company by countless croaking frogs and the ubiquitous drone of insect life. At length, the creek curled sharply to the south, and after following it a few hundred feet, Maggie stepped into the wolves' glen.

It was every bit as spooky as she'd imagined it. A boggy clearing, bound by cypress trees, many of which dropped gnarled roots into the gurgling creek. Cacti and wilted orchids grew from the forest loam, and the tight knot of trees surrounding the place swallowed every hint of breeze. A snake loosened itself from one of the cypress trees and parted the creek's surface like a scalpel. Normally, that would have sent Maggie scattering, but her fear of snakes seemed silly when weighed against what she was about to do.

Following Maw Maw's ritual, Maggie lifted the sundress and slid it over her head. She crossed her arms over her breasts. The glade might be in the middle of nowhere, but standing naked in the woods was still enough to make Maggie feel self-conscious. Civilization wasn't that far away. Maggie wasn't supermodel skinny, but she wasn't overweight either, and her stomach showed not even the humble beginnings of pregnancy. One hand dropped to her belly and she rested it there, as if drawing strength from the life inside.

This night was crazy, embarrassing, terrifying.

But none of that mattered.

Maggie found a comfortable spot and lay on the ground. Back to the earth, head to the creek, just as Maw Maw had indicated. The ground was remarkably comfortable, a natural bed of leaves and vines that felt not only cool, but sensual. She sank into the forest's

embrace, momentarily forgetting the threat of alligators, water moccasins, and hikers out for a midnight stroll. Instead she reveled in the wild abandon of the place, stretching her arms and feeling the blessed breeze return for a quick trip across her body. This was a magical place; she could feel it. Like the earth's spirit, emanating from the soil and dashing her worries.

Then she heard the whispers.

At first it might have the voice of the forest, a symphony of insect wings, crackling pinecones and the crowing of night birds. But these disparate sounds came together to form a single voice, the kind a shadow might have if given the ability to speak.

Sweet Maggie

She nearly lost her nerve. Only her grandmother's warnings about what the wolves would do if she decided to run kept her from doing so. *Once they get your scent, there's no turning back. You either go through with it, or someone will find your chewed carcass floating in the Neches.* So Maggie bit back a scream and resisted the urge to bolt. The peace she'd felt moments before fled. The trees loomed like prison bars, and the leaves beneath her back felt like tiny mouths nipping at her flesh. She remained as still as possible, praying the voice would go away.

What a glorious creature. A second voice, from somewhere to her right.

Such a wanton thing to lay naked in the forest.

Such a tasty lump of meat.

Are you with us, brother?

And a third voice answered, this one so thick with menace that tears formed in Maggie's eyes.

I am indeed. Shall we take a closer look? Maybe a small taste? Maybe a large taste.

They crept into the glen, three massive wolves the color of midnight clouds, moving on silent paws like pieces of night detached from the sky. One ran its sandpaper tongue across her forehead while another rested its head across her torso. Maggie whimpered, as the reality of the situation hit her. The wolves weren't just folk tales, and she had no idea what they intended to do to her. The third wolf sniffed at her feet, then moved its nose up her legs until it reached her thighs. It sniffed again then raised its head, lips pulled back from its teeth in what appeared to be a terrible attempt to smile.

This one's a tub o' child.

Maggie's panicked. Would these things try and take Bailey? What the hell was she doing here? The wolf sniffed again, and she wanted to speak up, to let them know they couldn't take the baby. His life was the only reason she came here. But Maw Maw had been very clear on this point. She had to lie perfectly still without speaking until asked a question. The wolf near her head licked her neck, her ear, her face, as if trying to determine the tastiest part. The others congregated near her pelvis, sniffing, prodding.

A child? Is he big enough to eat?

Not yet, but given time.

What a pity.

We could always take him now, eat him later.

Yes? When he's got some fat.

The wolf at Maggie's head growled and the others fell silent. It stood over Maggie's head, watching her with impassive eyes. *Why do you lay here in the woods?*

It was Maggie's cue to speak, and she repeated the ritual response she'd rehearsed with Maw Maw, her voice clipped with terror. "I offer myself to the gods of the glen. Your humble servant seeks a boon."

And what price will you pay for this boon?

"Anything the gods demand."

And you do so willingly?

"I do."

Very well. Name your boon.

"I'm pregnant. And the doctor says the baby has problems. I just want him to come out normal. Healthy."

Ah! Can't very well eat the child now. How she teases us.

Dangles a choice bit of meat then yanks it away.

Cruel woman.

The wolf at Maggie's head, which she assumed to be the leader, growled again. *Your boon is granted.*

Maggie wasn't sure what to expect, but there was no tingly sensation of magic at work, no sudden feeling of well-being emanating from her belly. Just the binding finality of the wolf's words, and the dark anticipation of what would come next.

Goodbye, Maggie.

Teaser.

Two of the wolves bounded from the glen, disappearing into the thicket, silent as shadows. Their leader remained. It circled Maggie several times, as if considering what sort of payment a healthy baby demanded. Surely it wouldn't kill her? If it did, she couldn't give birth to Bailey, and that would violate their agreement. Wouldn't it? But it could do other things. Cripple her. Give her a disease like Johnny Dale Adams. Gnaw out her eyes so she could never see Bailey's smile. A litany of horrors raced through her mind as the wolf continued to pace. At last it came to a stop, rested its head against her chest, listening to her speeding heart.

My brothers are shortsighted. They think only of flesh and blood. Morsels of meat. But I understand the value of subtle gifts. Less tangible to the eye, to be sure. But worth far more than muscle and bone.

Maggie felt no pain when the wolf pressed its teeth into her sternum, slowly driving them deeper. Despite that, she wanted more than ever to abandon the madness of the situation. But she feared breaking the ritual more than the wolf's price. Its teeth sank deeper, but the expected rush of blood never came. The wolf might as well have bitten into a wax likeness. When his voice came again, it was in her head, a violation of her inner thoughts.

Goodbye, Maggie. Give my love to Bailey.

Maggie tried to scream, but the world turned black when the wolf's teeth found her heart.

Maggie sat in Maw Maw's old rocking chair and allowed Bailey to feed from her breast. He was an eager eater, a healthy, happy ball of perfection that had never suffered so much as a cold in his first year on earth.

Taking care of a child, even a normal one, turned out to be much more difficult than Maggie expected. Child care was expensive, and when added to the cost of diapers and the suddenly unaffordable rent on her apartment, she'd had little choice but to quit her job and move in with Maw Maw. But there was no wonderful nostalgia left in the cabin. Maggie felt nothing there but a pressing sense of guilt. Maw Maw spent most days gathering plants for her medicines, or occupying herself with other outdoor activities, and Maggie was thankful. She liked to think of her Maw Maw as the laughing, loving grandmother she'd always admired, not the dour old woman who chastised her with unspoken disapproval. The one who lived in horror of what her granddaughter had become.

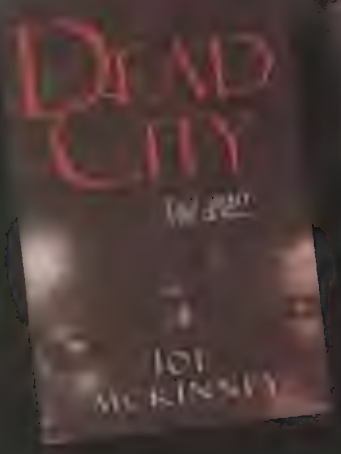
Bailey pulled away, giggling and satisfied, eyes brimming with life. Maggie's breast bore scars from the thicket wolf's teeth: smooth, fleshy lumps that formed a perfect impression of its mouth around her heart. A constant reminder of what had been taken from her. Bailey kicked his legs, wanting to play, but she put him in his playpen. Maggie had no interest in the child. She realized she should be happy, overwhelmed with love and delighted at the simple miracles of childhood. But she felt nothing when Bailey attempted to say her name, smiled for the first time, popped out his first tooth.

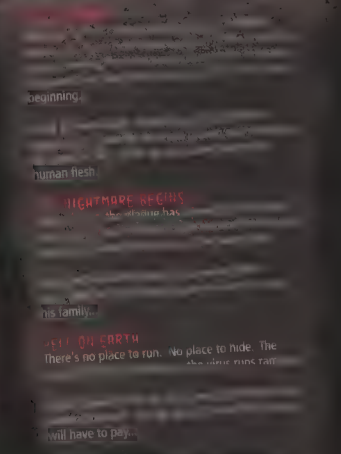
She wanted to love him. But she had none left.

Maggie took a seat at the table. She lit a lavender-scented candle to chase away the stench of sour milk and desperation. Bailey bounced around the playpen, every laugh mocking her miserable state. Maggie sat in the growing darkness, considering the ruin her life had become, and she wondered for the first time what kind of boon the gods of the glen would give her for such a tasty morsel of meat.

For a happy, healthy, baby boy. ❧

DEAD CITY





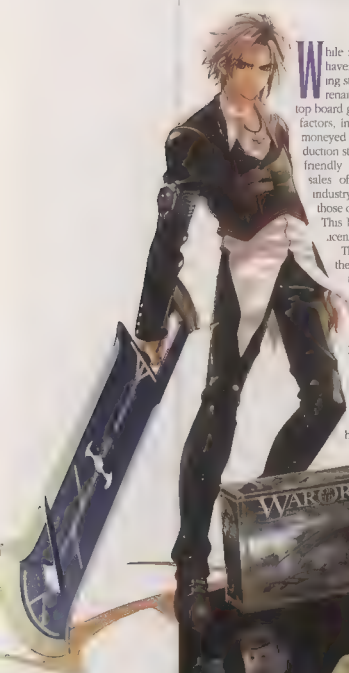
ISBN #0-7860-17813

From the very first page of this urban thriller [illegible] you'll be turning [illegible] and-nerves award the kill. Gritty suspense.

www.JoeMcKinney.net

By Eric T. Baker

The board game renaissance is evident in *War of the Ring* from Fantasy Flight.



Spectral Souls

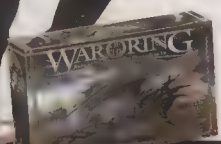
While it is easy to miss if you haven't been in a hobby gaming store in a while, there is a renaissance going on in tabletop board games. A combination of factors, including an older, more moneyed player base, higher production standards, and more user-friendly rules sets has allowed sales of board games (as an industry segment) to challenge those of collectible card games.

Lego Star Wars II

This broader market has allowed publishers to pursue some very famous licenses, and none is more famous in fantasy circles than *The Lord of the Rings*.

The board game *War of the Ring* from Fantasy Flight games is in many ways the best of several board games that have been published over the years that have allowed players to simulate the epic battles chronicled in the trilogy. It is definitely the game with the best map and the best components. The map is huge, easily twice the size of most board game maps. The components consist of 200 plastic miniatures representing the heroes and armies from the books, as well as 135 counters, 100 event and character cards, and 20 dice.

Where *WotR* falls down compared to some of the other versions, SPI's *War of the Ring* from 1977 for example, is its rule book. None of the separate mechanics of the game are difficult or obtuse, but the rule book doesn't give as much help as many players will want in integrating them. First-time players are well advised to play a few practice turns before resetting the board and starting over.



In play, *WotR* does an excellent job of recreating the action of the books. This is not a simulation for players wanting to play the big "What if?" of Tolkien's background. The Free Peoples player must first convince his various states that there is a war to be fought before they can muster for it, and while a military victory for the Free People is possible, a lot of the game has to do with the progress of the Fellowship and getting the Ring to the Crack of Doom. At the same time,

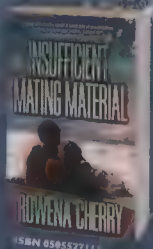
Lego Star Wars II

FROM USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHORS
C.T. ADAMS & CATHY CLAMP

"Scandals happen every day in Washington, but some are covered up more than others. When a U.S. Senator happens to be a shapeshifting jaguar, that's kept quiet. But when he's also a serial killer . . . what then? Raphael Ramirez is putting on his Wolven badge once more to tread dangerous waters. Catherine Turner has no idea what is about to happen to her when the full moon rises tonight. Even if she doesn't go mad and turn feral, both she and Raphael might still wind up dead if Jack Simpson has his way.

Tor Books January 02, 2007

EXPLORE OTHERWORLDLY ADVENTURES WITH TODAY'S TOP PARANORMAL AUTHORS!



ISBN 0505527111

Trapped together like animals in an alien zoo's breeding program, the politically embarrassing Royals, Djetth and Princess Marie, are sizzling sparks but whether it's love or hate...

FROM RITA AWARD WINNING AUTHOR
LINNEA SINCLAIR

With the new alliance between the Triad and the Unified Coalition, Captain Tasha "Sass" Sebastian finds herself serving under her former nemesis, bio-cyber Admiral Brandon Kel-Paten—and doing her best to hide a deadly past. But when an injured mercenary winds up in their ship's sick bay, her efforts may be wasted. Wanted rebel Jace Serafino has information that could expose all of Sass's secrets, tear the fragile Alliance apart. Soon it's clear that their prisoner could bring down everything they once believed was worth dying for—and everything they now have to live for...

Bantam Books February 27, 2007

the game contains so much random ness thanks to the dice and the event cards that it ends up being remarkably balanced. Not for everyone, *WotR* is for fans of Middle Earth who don't mind a learning curve to their games

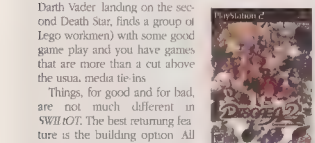
Speaking of licenses . two big ones are combined in *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy*, by Traveller's Tales and from Lucas Arts for the PC and every game system except the Wii and the PS3 This is the sequel to last year's goofy hit, *Lego Star Wars*. Both games are set in the *Star Wars* universe and the game events roughly follow the events of the films. but all the characters back

grounds, vehicles and equipment are rendered as if they were made from Lego bricks Add a slightly irreverent tone (in a cut scene Darth Vader landing on the second Death Star, finds a group of Lego workmen) with some good game play and you have games that are more than a cut above the usua. media tie-ins

Things, for good and bad, are not much different in *SWII tOT*. The best returning feature is the building option All over the game, players will find stacks of Lego bricks In the first game Jedi can form these stacks into various things to help solve puzzles and complete levels The second game finds the piles still around, but now nearly all the characters can build with them At some points this mechanic is even combined with the best new feature of the game- the various vehicle sections In the middle of a fight characters may be able to find enough pieces to construct their own Walker and finish the battle driving it

Of the features that could have been changed but weren't, number one on the list is the camera All the levels, whether on foot or in a vehicle, are played from a fixed-camera view that is sort of behind the characters, while also being tied to the background The upshot is that there are doors and switches in the game that the player simply can't see More than once players will find themselves stuck and will have to randomly poke into blind corners before finding the exit they need The camera is frustrating because it mars what is otherwise a very enjoyable game that is kid friendly without being childish The fun of the game and its discount price definitely make it worth checking out even with its annoying camera

A game with a much more annoying flaw is *Spectral Souls* from NIS America for the PSP NIS specializes in taking Japanese-created role-playing



games and bringing them to the United States Some of these games are quite good (see below) and some of them aren't. *SS* is odd because it was a definitely a good example of its genre when it was on the PS2 This version, however, has been ported to the PSP, a platform that really needs good role-playing games, and the transformation has not gone well

A turn-based rather than an "action" RPG. *SS* faces off the player's characters against the game's characters on a series of maps The character plots each character's moves and the attacks are then resolved in turn. The strategy of the battle system is tied to using hold and charge attacks to hit enemy characters with the greatest combination of special moves possible At the same time, the game is different from most RPGs in that the player can switch freely from one side to another in the three sided war Victories by character makes for one army limit the defeated army, even when the player switches to play it. Ultimately, the players are the deciding factor in which side wins the war, but they can do a lot of switching before one of the

NEW TITLES FROM

Triskelion Publishing

www.triskelionpublishing.net

JEWEL OF THE DRAGON

by Lynne Connolly

ISBN: 1601860404
MSRP $7.99

Dev Wyvern is Welsh, tall, dark and sexy as sin. He's also a shapeshifter. When he walks into Alix Lancaster's jewelry shop she knows her brother, Clay, is setting a trap for him.

Clay is a member of the PHR, sworn enemies of all Talents. So does Alix betray her brother by warning Dev, or let him walk into a lethal snare? Dev is drawn to Alix like few other women. But can he trust her?

Sent by the enigmatic Cristos, the boss of Department 57 to expose a PHR cell, he finds love and danger waiting for him. He takes both of them on, and has to make a choice? Will she forgive him if he destroys the brother of the woman he loves? Will they get out alive?

WINTER'S DAUGHTER

by J.C. Wilder

ISBN: 1601860390
MSRP $7.99

Synnamon Angelov returns to the abandoned family home where her worst nightmares war with vague memories of her tumultuous childhood.

Her mother's untimely death twenty years before, set off a chain of events that no one could have foreseen, least of all, Syn.

One cold rainy night, she and her younger siblings were forced from their home by the superstitious people of Salem, Virginia.

Haunted by her dreams and half-buried memories, Syn returns to Salem in order to locate her missing siblings and find the answers behind the nightmares that stalk her.

Take Your Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Writing to the Next Level at

Odyssey

THE SUMMER WRITING WORKSHOP

June 11-July 20, 2007

Six weeks of directed study with Jeanne Cavelos, former Senior Editor at Bantam Doubleday Dell and winner of the World Fantasy Award.

- Intensive sessions on plot, character, world building
- Detailed feedback on your writing
- Learn how to get published

Held at Saint Anselm College, Manchester, NH.

Application deadline: April 15

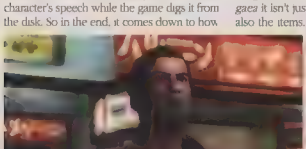
Visit: www.sff.net/odyssey
Or call (603) 673-4834

Guest Lecturers:
MICHAEL A. BURSTEIN • RODMAN PHILBRICK
JOHN CLUTE • ELIZABETH HAND
MICHAEL A. ARNZEN • GEORGE SCITHERS

WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE:
NINA KIRIKI HOFFMAN

final scenes plays out

All of this would be fine, and a lot of fun, if it was properly programmed into the PSP But it isn't Instead what happens is that the game is constantly going back to the disk for data it should have in its RAM maps, combat moves, and even dialogue The dialogue isn't spoken, but there is a second of delay between each character's speech while the game digs it from the disk. So in the end, it comes down to how



much patience the player has The lag is all that keeps it from an unreserved recommendation

Speaking of a good recommendation, there is NIS's other import for this season, *Disgaea 2* This game is for the PS2 and there is no bad programming here. Or at least there is no more than the usual loading times and no lag to speak of In many other ways it is very similar to *Spectral Souls* It is a turn-based RPG, with beautiful but 2-D graphics. The player controls a lot of characters and fights them against the computer's characters, trying to control spaces on the map and to hit enemies with as many chained attacks as possible

What makes *D2* particularly attractive compared to other Japanese RPGs is the same thing that makes *Lego Star Wars* stand out from many other American action games humor In *D2*, one of the special maneuvers is stacking the player's characters on top of one another This tower of characters can then either throw one another around the map or chain attacks. Or they can order pizza in the middle of the battle, although they don't have to be in a tower to do that From maneuvers to story to setting, *D2* is almost always playing for a laugh

The (semi-)serious mechanic that *D2* maintains from the first game which sets it apart as a universe is a complete obsession with leveling All RPGs are about leveling, but in *Disgaea* it isn't just the characters who level. It is also the items. And they don't just level into the 10s or the 100s It is possible to level into the 1000s in *D2* There is a whole dungeon system just for gaining and leveling items that has no direct relation to the main story. In short, *D2* is a game for the sort of players who love to see just how completely they can use up a game, and who like to laugh while doing it

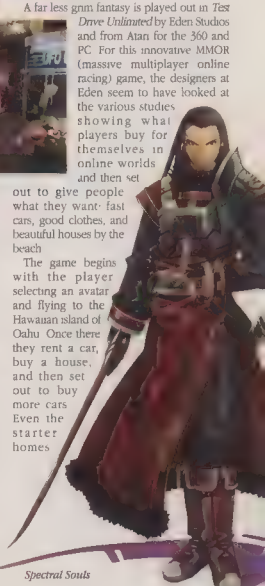
Some demons are magical with pointy horns and forked tails like the ones in *Disgaea 2*. Other demons live in the real world and have normal, human features Such is the setting of *Yakuza*, on the PS2 from Sega, where it is the modern day, and all the characters are human, but many of them are more deeply evil than the human beings of other games. *Yakuza* is a noirish thriller of a video game about a gangster with honor who takes a rap for an old friend, then returns from prison to find that all is not as it seemed

Looking at *Yakuza*, there is the temptation to think of it as another *Grand Theft Auto* knockoff, but it isn't. The closest the hero comes to a car is the taxis he sometimes climbs into to teleport across the relatively small area of Tokyo where all the game's action takes place. Mostly Kazuma, the hero, runs from place to place. And mostly what he does when he gets there is beat people to a pulp with his fists or various found weapons There is a lot of fighting in *Yakuza*; sometimes Kazuma doesn't even make it to where he is going before he is jumped

In an action RPG, there is always a tension in how to balance the combat and mini-games against the cut and dialogue scenes. *Yakuza* has a fairly robust combat system where Kazuma uses a finite but comprehensive collection of blows and combinations to build up his "heat" meter. When it is full, he can then do various finishing moves that trigger miniature cut scenes of their own. Both visually and for the sake of earning experience points, the player wants to use the finishing moves as much as possible, but ultimately the sameness of the combat may overwhelm some players' desire to find out how the story ends The game is worth playing and the end is worth knowing, but getting there is best done in small doses

A far less grim fantasy is played out in *Test Drive Unlimited* by Eden Studios and from Atari for the 360 and PC For this innovative MMOR (massive multiplayer online racing) game, the designers at Eden seem to have looked at the various studies showing what players buy for themselves in online worlds and then set out to give people what they want: fast cars, good clothes, and beautiful houses by the beach

The game begins with the player selecting an avatar and flying to the Hawaiian island of Oahu Once there they rent a car, buy a house, and then set out to buy more cars Even the starter homes



Spectral Souls

Spectral Souls

are huge and beautifully furnished, and players start with enough virtual cash that they can still go buy a car that is likely better than the one they have in real life. It is certainly cleaner and shinier. And it doesn't need gas

From this unhumble beginning, players strike out to explore the island and compete in races. Winning races earns the player money that can be spent on more cars, clothes for their avatar, and more houses. Since players can only own as many cars as they have garage space for, most players will end up with multiple homes. There is a wide variety of races, both single-player tests and multiplayer challenges

What sets *TDU* apart from other racing games, particularly others with an online component, is that Oahu is the "lobby." If players want to challenge other players, they can go to one of the sites of a multiplayer match, or they can just flash their lights at someone else cruising down the road near them. If that person accepts the challenge, then the game drops them into a private race for a money stake, winner takes all.

The only thing to be said against *TDU* is also its strength. there is no overarching plot line to pull players through the game. Players just get in their car and drive and explore and shop and meet other drivers and form clubs and do lots of racing. The fate of the island or virtual character does not hang on the player's in-game actions. Instead players have lots and lots of miles of road and all the time in the world to drive them at their leisure.

Rothshield

Chasing Shadows

By James F. Morin

ISBN# 1593304226

Discover what lurks in shadow

ASSIMILATE THIS

REGENERATE ANYWHERE~NO ALCOVE NEEDED!

SciFi's most versitile, recognizable prop now fits in your palm.

Pocket Plasma~

Flat Panel Plasma Lightning Disk Responds to Touch, Voice & Music Battery Operated -- Clip Anywhere.

ONLY $19.95 each

plus $8 total shipping

Resistance is futile

Order online or via mail

Please specify color

availabe in: green, rainbow, white, magenta, sunburst, blue

434 Tenafly Rd Englewood, NJ 07631

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation (Publication No. Realms of Fantasy Magazine) 2. Publication number 1070-1915 3. Filing date 10/1/06 4. Issue Frequency Bimonthly 5. Number of Issues Published Annually 6 6. Annual Subscription Price $19.95 7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not printer) 1 Commerce Park Drive, Suite 300, Williamsport, Lycoming County, Pennsylvania 17701-6396 8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not printer) Same as above 9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Address of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor. Publisher Alisa Kwitney 1 Commerce Park Drive, Suite 300, Williamsport, PA 17701 Editor Shawna McCarthy 1 Commerce Park Drive, Suite 300, Williamsport, PA 17701 Managing Editor None 10. Owner (Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of the individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a nonprofit organization, give its name and address.) Sovereign Media Co., 1 Commerce Park Drive, Suite 300, Williamsport, PA 17701 11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box → None 12. Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates) (Check one) The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes: Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months (Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement) Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)

13. Publication Name	14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below
Realms of Fantasy	August 2006

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)	100,000	100,000
b. Paid Circulation (By Mail and Outside the Mail) (1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541. (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	45,000	45,000
(2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541. (Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)	0	0
(3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®	0	0
(4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS®	0	0
c. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4))	45,000	45,000
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail) (1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	0	0
(2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	0	0
(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g. First-Class Mail)	0	0
(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)	0	0
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3) and (4))	0	0
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)	45,000	45,000
g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page #3))	55,000	55,000
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)	100,000	100,000
i. Percent Paid (15c divided by 15f times 100)	100%	100%

16. Publication of Statement of Ownership: If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the November/December 2006 issue of this publication. Publication not required.

17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: Mark Ann Ver: 8 Jun

MOVING?

Please notify us of your move 6 weeks in advance, so we can keep *Realms of Fantasy* coming to you. Send us your old and new address, and the date of your move to:

REALMS OF FANTASY
Sovereign Media Company, Inc.
1000 Commerce Park Drive, Suite 300
Williamsport, PA 17701

New from J.J. Massa

Daddy's Girl

A girl can't choose who her parents are but Tabitha Baker isn't complaining. Her mother died when she was young leaving her with a psychic gift and precious memories. Her father loves her, though. He's a good man – the entire country agrees. They just don't know their president is her father.

Garth Cavanaugh is a Secret Service agent assigned to the President of the United States. He doesn't tell most people that, only his family. He'd like to introduce them to the woman he's dating, but she seems to be hiding something, maybe even someone…

www.jjmassa.com
Join J.J. on MySpace!
www.myspace.com/jjmassa
JJ at Amazon
http://www.amazon.com/gp/pdp/profile/A11U9NIKA57TU8

Join the Seeker's Quest...

"Reynolds draws the Seeker's Quest to its surprising and spectacular conclusion with all the skill of a master story teller. This is a must read fantasy series."
Independent Fantasy Review

At fine bookstores everywhere
www.SeekersQuest.net

number

Continued from page 65

Eleutherio was tired all over again. Had he just killed his mother? She'd been dead for years. "You don't come out in the daylight often."

Old Kevyn nodded slowly. "New wizard don't come to his power often."

"Sure. Did you make all … that … happen?"

"Some of the *nombrejos* worked together on it. It was time, kid. You're getting older."

"I'm twelve. That ain't old."

"Old enough." Old Kevyn hunkered down next to his shopping cart. "You ever wonder why we're such a bunch of weirdos, kid? Us *nombrejos*? Misfits in the third degree."

"Never thought about it, really." *Nombrejos* were *nombrejos*. He'd always assumed their powers had eaten through them, changed them, made them something else.

"Most of us don't find numbers until it's way too late. Wizard stuff … magic … it changes a person. Not many kids come to it." Old Kevyn sighed. "We was kind of hoping you'd grow up straight and clean and true and smart. Get a job at a bank or something. Use the power of your numbers to do more than kill off rats and keep poor kids breathing a little longer. Save neighborhoods, cities." He leaned forward. "We believe, kid, but we're … busted open. Us wizards. No one comes to it whole. Me and some of the others, the ones who still think halfway straight, we thought … hoped." He sighed. "You, kid. You're the next big thing."

Eleutherio started to cry, startling himself. He couldn't remember ever simply letting go and sobbing. "I just killed my mother. I never knew her, never knew she existed. And you made me *kill* her."

"She's been dead for years, kid. And now … now you don't have to ride that bus'all day long to have your power. It's inside you." A few rattling breaths. "Right?"

He thought about the bus. It was just a bus again, stalled out of place in an intersection a few blocks away. The transit magic was in him now. "Yeah."

"Everybody has a trial to come to their powers, kid. Yours was just a little better organized."

Eleutherio was quiet for a while. He studied his fingers, refusing to look up at Old Kevyn. He didn't know what he wanted, but nothing felt right now. He was too big, overfilling his skin with grief and power both.

Was this what it meant to be a grown-up? Responsible for things you hated?

"I want to go home," he finally said. Eleutherio got up.

Old Kevyn put his arm around Eleutherio's shoulders. "Come on, kid."

They stashed the cart and took the bus. Route 17, coach number 4471. Eleutherio didn't think about the numbers at all. Instead he let the old man keep hugging him all the way back to their stop.

Ellora's Cave Presents

FULFILL ALL YOUR FANTASIES WITH SCINTILLATING TALES FROM THE MISTRESSES OF EROTIC ROMANCE

Now Available in E-book from

Ellora's Cave

We wrote the book on erotic romance

www.ellorascave.com

The Scourge invites you to a showdown in Hell . . .

Available now
wherever books are sold.

THE BLACK TATTOO

SAM ENTHOVEN

art by JOHN JUDE PALENCAR

razor bill Razorbill, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. • www.penguin.com/teens • www.theblacktattoo.com

You are one with the land. Bury your enemies in it.

Defend the Americas as the mighty Sioux, Iroquois, or Aztecs. As a WarChief, command beasts of the forest, strengthen units, and speed them to the point of attack. Sway fierce battles in your favor against encroaching European forces. Your power grows as you master new maps and a new single-player campaign. This land will bear your legacy forever. www.ageofempires3.com

Games for Windows

Microsoft game studios

ENSEMBLE STUDIOS

TEEN T

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence